MYSTIFYING MOVIES

NOËL CARROLL

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FADS & FALLACIES IN CONTEMPORARY FILM THEORY

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Dedicated to Annette Michelson

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INTRODUCTION

THIS is a book concerned with certain central topics in contemporary film theory, a term of art by which I mean to designate film theory that proceeds within a semiological framework, indeed, most particularly, within a semiological framework amplified by Marxism and psychoanalysis. "Contemporary film theory," in this book, stands in contrast to what might be thought of as "classical film theory," that is, film theory prior to the advent of semiology.[1] Though this sounds like a strict chronological distinction, it is not. For works in the classical tradition, by theorists like Stanley Cavell and V. F. Perkins, have been written since semiology arrived on the scene. Rather, for our purposes, the mark of contemporary film theory is *a positive commitment* to the dialogue opened by the rise of film semiology, an event which, for convenience, we might date as vaguely in the vicinity of 1966–1967 when Christian Metz wrote the essays that compose his *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*.[2]

Contemporary film theory, conceived of as semiologically derived film theory, moreover, has two stages: a first stage in which Saussurean linguistics provided the dominant model, followed by what is sometimes called the second semiology, in which Marxism and psychoanalysis became the preferred conceptual tools. Contemporary film theorists do not regard this transition as a sharp break because the brands of Marxism and psychoanalysis they bought were themselves influenced by Saussurean linguistics. From the vantage point of the reception of contemporary film theory in America, the heyday of the first semiology was brief. Shortly after Metz's earlier, Saussurean-derived essays on film theory were translated into En-

glish, his more psychoanalytically oriented work began to appear along with essays in the influential British film journal *Screen* which towed a strident Marxist-psychoanalytic line. Since the early mid-seventies, at least, contemporary film theory has primarily developed along the lines of the second semiology. And it is the second semiology—an amalgamation of psychoanalysis, Marxism, and semiology—with which this book is almost exclusively preoccupied.

In the United States, Marxist-psychoanalytic-semiology is the dominant form of film theory and it has enjoyed this position for at least a decade. This is not to say that everyone in film studies, stateside, practices this variety of film theory, but only that it represents the most vocal and most influential school of thought in the field. It is the second semiology that has attracted many of the younger and most ambitious scholars in film studies. It provides much of the jargon for major academic film journals and film conferences; and most books published in film theory by academic presses are in its idiom; there are several anthologies devoted to its teachings, such as Philip Rosen's *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*.[3] In the United States, Marxist-psychoanalytic-semiology is the film theory of the academic establishment. This book is designed to explore several of the central concepts, presuppositions, and doctrines of the dominant film theory for the express purpose of challenging them. Specifically, I shall argue that in their attempts to show how movies purportedly mystify spectators, contemporary film theorists, in fact, mystify our understanding of cinema.

The reception of contemporary film theory in America is an epicycle within a larger historical process which involves the rapid expansion of film studies as an academic field of study in the seventies. This expansion, in turn, seems initially to have been a response to a resurgence of interest in film in the sixties, marked, in part, by the rediscovery and reaffirmation of the masterpieces of the Hollywood cinema. One might explain this by noting that the movie boom of the sixties roughly corresponds with the coming of age of the baby boom generation, a generation brought up on old American films on TV and predisposed to take those beloved objects seriously. The baby boomers supplied the enrollment for increasingly larger film appreciation classes and, then, programs, as well as, in time, supplying the faculty to those programs.

To a great extent, the French provided the most important intellectual role model for the development of film appreciation in America in the sixties. They had already extolled the glories of Hollywood cinema in such journals as *Cahiers du Cinéma* and that sensibility, as well, gained persuasive force insofar as it was incorporated into the vital film movement known as

the French New Wave, which comprised such artists as Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Rohmer, et al. From the perspective of theory, the Americans benefitted from the adoption of two conceptual tools developed in France: auteurism and the theory of realism propounded by André Bazin.[4]

Auteurism was the doctrine that maintained that films were commendable insofar as they manifested the distinctive personality of their maker (author/*auteur*) who, in general, was identified with their director. A routine Hollywood genre film, thus, could be a great film if it bore the individual stamp of its director—e.g., of a John Ford, a Howard Hawks, an Alfred Hitchcock. Indeed, for some, Hollywood films had the best chance at greatness for it was presumed, mistakenly I think, that the Hollywood studio system was a great obstacle to the personal expression of the master filmmakers, and, in consequence, that their overcoming this obstacle made their achievements all the more meritorious.

Auteurism was not really much of a theory; it was actually a form of connoisseurship. However, it did have the virtue of supplying one with a way to organize an unwieldy field of study in terms of a canon of great directors, and with a research program—view all the films of the great directors, identify their recurring features, and stay on the lookout for undiscovered great directors. This may not sound like much; but it was a way to at least start film studies during its period of rapid expansion.

With Bazin, Americans encountered a sophisticated view of the ontology of film which was also connected to a powerful account of the evolution of film history. Bazin held that the film image was an objective re-presentation of the past, a veritable slice of reality. Critically, this disposed him to applaud realist cinema, notably that associated with the use of deep-focus cinematography and with filmmakers such as Renoir, Welles, Wyler, and the Italian Neo-Realists. Bazin was useful to the emerging field of film studies in numerous respects. First, he showed people a way to think of film stylistically rather than simply thematically. Moreover, he proposed a way of dividing up film history stylistically, and, in the course of this, he introduced the notion that there was a classical style of filmmaking, an idea that still fuels much film theory. And, as well, Bazin offered a narrow category of film realism which was fruitful for contrasting film styles and for rediscovering forgotten directors (namely, those who used deep focus cinematography).

Though the contributions of auteurism and Bazin were enabling, they also had various shortcomings. Conceptually, auteurism reversed the critical order of things. Typically, we identify great artists by their masterpieces; but auteurism seemed to imply that a work was a masterpiece if it

was by a great artist, i.e., that a film by Preston Sturges, no matter how bad it seems, is a masterpiece because it is by Preston Sturges. Similarly, Bazin's account of the ontology of film may very well be incoherent[5] and his advocacy of deep-focus realism was parochial. Thus, by the early seventies, American film studies was ripe for a new approach to theory.

Moreover, along with the conceptual liabilities of auteurism and the Bazinian approach there was also the feeling that these projects were politically insensitive. The expansion of American film studies in its early stages, of course, corresponds to the political awakening that occasioned the Vietnam War. Film scholars, like scholars in other fields, wanted to make their research relevant to political life, and this project, furthermore, was eminently plausible since films do seem somehow connected with ideology. Auteurism and the Bazinian approach, however, were narrowly aesthetic in their focus; whereas film scholars wanted theoretical tools that would facilitate political engagement.

Again film scholars turned to the French from whose highly developed film culture they had acquired the auteurist and Bazinian models. This time around the reigning film theory was a form of semiology inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. As was already remarked, Christian Metz was the leading proponent of this mode of theorizing in film. Undoubtedly, part of the attractiveness of this style of theory was its pretensions to being scientific. Metz was adopted by Americans at a point when linguistics enjoyed special notoriety—when the name Chomsky was a household word (i.e., in academic households). Thus, it is no surprise that a nascent field like cinema studies, with anxieties about its legitimacy, should hitch its fortunes to a star. However, it seems to me that an even more important factor in the adoption of semiology by young American film scholars was their sense that it could be politically useful.

It may sound mysterious to claim that a theoretical model based on linguistics could be thought to be relevant to political analysis. However, the reasoning seems to have been that whereas someone like Bazin treated the cinematic image as if it were a virtually natural phenomenon, a linguistically oriented semiology at least regarded cinema as a symbol system that is socially constructed. That is, semiology studied cinema as a social means of communication and a cultural artifact. Thus, semiology, though not explicitly political, brought together the study of film and the study of society. And, of course, in the early seventies, many were prone to uphold that anything social was at least implicitly political.

Again, the first stage of semiology was not long lived in this country. Metz's theory had a number of problems: it seemed descriptive rather than

explanatory; its crowning accomplishment, *the grand syntagmatique,* a typology of choices of the narrative structures of the classical cinema set out like a flow chart, was difficult to apply with uniform results; and it was not clear that those results were significantly informative (i.e., after you segmented a film, then what and so what?).[6] Moreover, though film scholars thought that linguistically oriented semiology afforded more political potential than rival theoretical models, they did not feel that it was a tool as suited to the task of ideological analysis as what they desired. They believed that the first semiology was keyed to the analysis of denotation rather than connotation, and that the most important dimension of study for ideological analysis was the connotative. Also, they thought that the first semiology paid insufficient attention to the spectator whereas in order to understand the ideological effects of film one would need a psychology of the audience. As a result, film scholars turned to a politicized version of psychoanalysis for a framework with which to study the ways in which cinema affected its spectators ideologically.

The second semiology, which in the second half of the seventies became the regnant film theory in the United States, is fundamentally a combination of elements of Althusserian Marxism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, along with contributions from various literary theorists, most notably Roland Barthes.[7] Its animating idea, derived from Louis Althusser, is that the primary function of ideology is to reproduce subjects who will carry out the roles and uphold the values that are required for the continued existence of a social order such as capitalism. This function is realized through a process called subject positioning which is engaged in all instances of communication, including cinema. The film scholar, who follows Althusser, then, proceeds by attempting to discern the ways in which film positions subjects. Film studies is aided in this by exploiting the work of Jacques Lacan, for Lacanian psychoanalysis is the form of psychology tailored for the study of subject positioning. Often when reading contemporary film theory, one is taken with the thought that it is really more a form of psychoanalytic theory rather than of Marxist theory. However, it is important to keep in mind that the putative justification for its psychoanalytic flights is the radical political conviction that ideology cannot be understood without a theory of subject positioning.

This hasty sketch of the second semiology will be worked out in detail in the rest of the book. The first chapter takes a close look at some of the inaugural articles of the second semiology by Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz. These articles differ in at least one important respect from the material to be discussed in the rest of the book, viz., these articles are

primarily psychoanalytic and not explicitly political. With the second chapter, we begin to deal with the politicized psychoanalytic approach that represents the core of contemporary film theory. There, specifically, I outline and criticize the overarching frameworks and presuppositions that contemporary film theory assembles from Althusser, Lacan, and others. The next three chapters, in turn, explore the application and extension of that framework to various topics in film theory. The third chapter deals with the treatment of the cinematic image by contemporary film theorists, reviewing their opinions about the status of pictorial representation, perspective, and the function of photography with respect to cinema. The fourth chapter takes up recent views of the function of narrative in the process of subject positioning. The fifth chapter discusses the ways in which narratives are rendered cinematically by means of features like editing and music, and what contemporary film theorists call "suture." The conclusion will examine some of what I believe are the fundamental methodological shortcomings of contemporary film theory and will make some recommendations about the directions post-contemporary film theory should take.

Although I have attempted to set the stage for what follows by offering a thumbnail sketch of the evolution of film studies, most of the rest of the book is not organized historically but topically. Also, though this stage setting has been done from the perspective of changes in American film studies, the ensuing discussion will not be primarily about American film theorists, but mainly about the French and British theorists who have influenced them. Undoubtedly, one might write a different introduction than mine from the vantage point of British or French film studies. I have chosen the American perspective, however, not only because it is the one I know best, but also because it seems the most effective way to situate and to motivate the issues for an American audience. Furthermore, since this book is not essentially a historical account of the rise of contemporary film theory, it seems to me that my neglect of the significance of such things as the student uprisings in Paris in May '68 and the politics of the British Film Institute for cinema studies is permissable.

This book is extremely critical of contemporary film theory. It contests, often in great detail, what I take to be the central tenets of contemporary film theory. However, it would be a mistake to think that the book is purely negative. For generally, after I have rejected the hypotheses offered by contemporary film theorists to account for this or that filmic phenomenon, I attempt to construct a positive hypothesis about the way in which the phenomenon in question might be theorized. So, for example, after criticizing contemporary accounts of movie narration, I present an alternative

account. These rival accounts are an integral part of my argument against contemporary film theory; for, following the traditional method of scientific debate, I am attempting to show the shortcomings of contemporary film theory by demonstrating that there are more attractive, competing theories that offer better explanations of the data at hand. That is, the case against contemporary film theory does not rest with simply noting its logical and empirical failings, but goes on to show there are superior, alternative ways of explaining the phenomena.

This book is a selection of topics in contemporary film theory; I do not pretend to canvass every topic in the field, though I think I manage to cover some pretty foundational ones. I can imagine, and, in fact, did imagine a book twice this length which would have delved into further topics such as genre theory, the avant-garde film, documentary film, the relation of theory to criticism, and so on. However, I finally settled upon the present, more manageable project.

Nevertheless, there is at least one topic of contemporary film theory which I have not broached directly and whose omission deserves comment. The topic is feminism. Anyone familiar with film study knows that feminism is one of its most active areas. So, one wonders, why I have not devoted at least a chapter to it. In order to answer this question, I must first note that feminism, including feminism in film studies, is not a monolithic enterprise. Many feminists in film work in the area that is sometimes called the study of the image of women in film. I have learned a great deal from them and am grateful for what they have taught me about our film culture and our society. They are not included in this book, however, because the purpose of this book is to oppose that which I take to be wrong in the area of contemporary film theory. And I do not take the feminists engaged in the study of women's images to be wrong.

Of course, there are other feminists in film studies who work explicitly within an Althusserian-Lacanian theoretical framework and I have not dealt with them either. My reason for this is simply that the criticisms I level at the framework of contemporary film theory are very foundational. So, if the foundation goes, then everything that rests on it goes as well. One cannot, for example, build a feminist theory of suture, if suture theory itself is flawed in ways that have nothing to do with the perhaps patriarchal biases of its inventors.

I predict that many feminist theorists will say that I mistakenly assume that they accept the presuppositions of contemporary film theory whole cloth, when, in fact, they reject its patriarchal orientation and are attempting to alter it in fundamental ways by, for example, developing a

theory of the female subject. Now, I think that they are probably right about the patriarchal orientation of Lacanianism, and it is certainly true that they are attempting to offer a theory of the female subject. However, in doing this they are essentially rebuilding the framework of contemporary film theory from the inside, whereas if I am right one ought not to try to rebuild it. One ought to scrap it entirely. One cannot develop a theory of female subject positioning if the very notion of subject positioning is insupportable.

Where there is opposition to contemporary film theory nowadays, it is often voiced by people who are opposed to theory building in general. But it is important to stress that my rejection of contemporary film theory does not spring from an antitheoretical bias. I consider myself to be a film theoretician. However, I am suspicious of the kind of theorizing we find practiced in film studies today. Broadly speaking, this theorizing is what I call "totalizing" and "top down." That is, it attempts to answer all our questions concerning filmic phenomena in terms of a unified theoretical vocabulary with a set of limited laws (primarily concerned with subject positioning) that are applied virtually like axioms. In contrast, I favor theorizing that is "piecemeal" and "bottom up." That is, where contemporary film theory presents itself as The Theory of Film (among other things), I prefer to propose film theor*ies*—e.g., a theory of suspense, a theory of camera movement, a theory of the Art Cinema, etc.—with no presumption that these small-scale theories will add up to one big picture. The contemporary film theorist can, of course, rebuke the piecemeal theorist by noting that his or her system has more theoretical elegance than a series of disjunct, small-scale theories. But that putative elegance is bought at the cost of extravagant ambiguity and vacuous abstraction. Or so I shall try to convince you.

1.

PSYCHOANALYSIS
METZ AND BAUDRY

IN my introduction, I noted that the first semiology was beset by a number of vexing problems, notably: it is descriptive rather than explanatory, the *grand syntagmatique* seemed difficult to employ with uniform results, and even if uniform results could be obtained, it is difficult to see the way in which those results were significantly informative. However, difficulties of this sort were not historically crucial in the transition to what is called the second semiology, which might also be called psychosemiology, due to its heavy reliance on psychoanalysis. That is, contemporary film theorists cite limitations, other than those just mentioned, as their primary motives for turning to psychoanalysis.

Among the difficulties that contemporary film theorists say led them to abandon their quasi-Saussurean model in favor of psychosemiology, is the notion that the latter, especially in its Althusserian-Lacanian formulation, is more useful for the analysis of ideology than the first semiology. That is, if the first semiology was more sensitive to ideology than previous film theory—insofar as the semiologist at least regarded cinema as a *socially constructed*, coded artifact—it was still not adequate *enough* for the purposes of ideological analysis. Related problems raised against the earlier semiology include the charge that it was too formalist; it was concerned with the cinematic sign to the exclusion of investigation of the effects of cinema on spectators, something felt to be key to the development of an account of the ideological power of movies.

Also, it is often repeated that the first semiology is best geared to the examination of the denotative structure of film whereas investigation of the

connotative structures is of greater importance, and, furthermore, it is asserted that psychoanalysis is the suitable tool for such a project. What is at issue in this contrast between "denotation" and "connotation" can be confusing since film theorists do not use these terms univocally, nor do they use them in their accepted philosophical sense (where "denotation" refers to the extension of a term and "connotation" is the meaning of a term). The denotative structures that the first semiology is said to study so well are the categories of articulating the spatio-temporal relations propounded in Metz's "*grand syntagmatique*." But what comprises the connotative dimension that supposedly still needs to be studied? For some theorists, this amounts to studying the affective component of film which projects, then, connects up with the study of the effects of film upon spectators. For other theorists, influenced by Roland Barthes, however, "connotation" appears to correlate with "ideology."[1] Thus, for these theorists the need to study connotation reduces to the call to investigate ideology.

Marxism, supplemented by psychoanalysis, was proclaimed to be the means by which these alleged shortcomings of the first semiology could be overcome. Presently, this fusion is broadly informed by the linkage of Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The desire to study ideology is the generally favored rationalization for the supplementation of Marxism with psychoanalysis. Thus, politics is invoked in order to ground the embrace of psychoanalysis. But, as we shall see in later chapters, the psychoanalytic component often appears to supersede the political component in contemporary film theory.

The tendency of psychoanalysis to be the dominating concern of contemporary film theory is quite evident in several of the seminal essays that attended the transition to the second semiology. Three of those essays are the focus of this chapter: Jean-Louis-Baudry's "The Apparatus"; Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier"; and Metz's "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study."[2] I have chosen to investigate these essays prior to discussing the formation of the presiding Lacanian-Althusserian paradigm in contemporary film theory for two reasons. First, though these founding essays of the second semiology have been integrated into the political polemic of the ruling paradigm, they are not themselves stridently political. They are overwhelmingly psychoanalytic in their preoccupations. Thus, though they can be adapted for ideological purposes, they are not essentially political, and should not just be lumped, without qualification, with ostensibly politicized semiology. This is not to say that either Metz or Baudry are averse to ideological analysis. Baudry, in another essay,[3] offers an ideological characterization of the apparatus, while Metz

makes asides in the essays examined here which suggest his sympathy with ideological analysis. However, in these essays, Baudry and Metz are clearly more concerned with the psychoanalytic effects of cinema on spectators than in the explicit, detailed analysis of the ideological effects of the medium.

A second difference between these three essays and the reigning Marxist-psychoanalytic paradigm is that these essays, though they make use of Lacanian psychoanalysis, are not as pervasively wedded to that model as is much contemporary film theory. The psychoanalyst Bertram Lewin plays a more important role than Lacan in Baudry's essay while Melanie Klein seems at least as important to Metz as is Lacan. Thus, since none of these essays is as Marxist or as Lacanian as is fashionable nowadays, I will treat them as apart from the dominant framework of contemporary film theory, while reemphasizing that these essays can be and have been easily dragooned into the service of the established film theory by the addition of a few crucial premises.

Baudry and Metz both employ psychoanalysis to describe and to explain the ways in which cinema affects us. Their method is to draw analogies between cinema and various forms of psychic phenomenon: daydreams, night dreams, syndromes, such as voyeurism and fetishism, and early psychosexual conditions and fantasies, such as primitive oral narcissism. The thinking behind this analogizing appears to be that if cinema is sufficiently like certain psychic phenomena, then we can begin to explain the power of cinema over us by extrapolating psychoanalytic explanations of the power that analogous psychic phenomena exert. That is, if cinema appreciably resembles certain forms of psychic phenomena, then we can hypothesize that the power of cinema is akin to the power of its pscyhic analogs: whatever desires those analogs satisfy, cinema satisfies; whatever compelling force those analogs mobilize, cinema mobilizes. Baudry, for example, analogizes film and night dream and infers that film satisfies the oral regressive penchant, also satisfied by night dream, of feeling undifferentiated from one's environment. Metz, in one essay,[4] introduces a corrective analogy between film and daydream, but reaches, nevertheless, some conclusions that correspond to Baudry's.

Analogies between cinema and dream have been with us almost as long as film. Since the turn of the century, with movies such as Edwin S. Porter's *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* and Griffith's *The Avenging Conscience,* filmmakers have attempted to mime or to represent mental processes, notably dreaming. In the art cinema, Buñuel's *The Andalusian Dog* and his *The Age of Gold* are famous examples of this, while Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* provides

another well-known, if prosaic, case. Hitchcock's *Spellbound* represents an attempt at dream illustration of a sort that is routine in popular cinema while Pabst's *Secrets of a Soul* is an essay in state-of-the-art Freudian theorizing about psychoanalytic interpretation which employs dream sequences created through consultation with practicing analysts Karl Abraham and Hans Sachs. In short, there is no question that a film or film sequence can imitate dream processes. Superimposition can be made to function like the primary process of condensation; disjunctive editing can ape the associative "logic" of dream. However, the claim that Metz and Baudry advance is not that *some* films are to be understood through analogies with psychic processes such as dreaming, but rather they conceptualize all of cinema by reference to psychic analogies. Their claim is theoretical and general, rather than critical. That is, since some filmmakers model some films and film sequences on psychic processes, it behooves a *critic* to explicate such films with an eye to the ways in which the films construe, or more often, misconstrue, the psychic processes they strive to represent. But the fact that some films can be unproblematically designated as analogs or attempted analogs to dreaming does not show that all films or that cinema as such is analogous to dreaming. And it is the latter theoretical point that Baudry and Metz are after.

The theoretical notion that film as such is analogous to dream is also longstanding. An early proposal of this outlook occurs in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "The Surrogate for Dreams," published in 1921.[5] Like Freudians of the period, Hofmannsthal conceives of dreams in terms of wish-fulfillment. Examining film technique, Hofmannsthal notes two wishes that it vicariously grants. Poetically, he refers to these wishes as the cloak of invisibility and the magic carpet ride. That is, through editing, the spectator travels through space; one minute she is in Europe and the next she is circling the minarets of Baghdad. By editing, film realizes the myth of the magic carpet. Also, the spectator is invisible to the spectacle; he watches Antony and Cleopatra embrace with impunity. Cinema, like Albrecht the Dwarf, supplies us with a cloak of invisibility, again counterfeiting a psychologically significant myth. In effect, part of what Hofmannsthal is arguing is that through its technique, film satisfies wishes for omnipotence—the ability to travel anywhere—and for omniscience—the ability to see anything while unseen. Interestingly, these notions reappear in Metz's theory which emphasizes the psychic importance of cinema by referring to the fantasy of perceptual mastery it evokes and to the possibility for voyeurism that it purportedly affords.[6] And like Hofmannsthall, Metz's account of the power of cinema presumes that spectators identify with the camera.

American theorists, of course, are very familiar with the film/dream hypothesis through the very influential and popular treatise by Susanne K. Langer entitled *Feeling and Form*.[7] There Langer notes what she takes to be three significant analogies between film and dream. In both phenomena, she asserts that the subject feels at the center of the visual array while the array itself promotes a compelling aura of givenness. She also notes that continuity in film, i.e., editing, abides by an affective or associative logic as does dream imagery. Langer's overall theory of art holds that the generic function of art is to clarify and to objectify—that is, to manifest externally—forms of feeling, aspects of our felt emotive life. Each art form, in turn, specializes, so to speak, in objectifying distinct domains of our emotive life. Film objectifies dream. Correspondingly, both Metz and Baudry identify part of the power of cinema as its manifestation of inner processes of the unconscious to the spectator, though, unquestionably, both in their psychoanalytic idiom and in their detailed conclusions about the significance of film, they are philosophically at odds with Langer.

Despite its long heritage, however, the theoretical correlation of film with such psychic phenomenon as dreaming is far from established. Baudry and Metz represent two of the most sustained efforts to carry off the analogy in a theoretically significant way. In what follows, I will examine their arguments very closely. By way of a preview, let me say that I think their project a dismal failure. After examining Metz's and Baudry's position in detail, the chapter concludes with general observations about the inadvisability of pursuing film theory through analogies with psychic phenomena and about the theoretical inappropriateness of psychoanalyzing the cinematic apparatus.

JEAN-LOUIS BAUDRY AND "THE APPARATUS"

A major reason, given by contemporary film theorists, for their shift from a semiological framework of study to a psychoanalytic one, is that the semiological model is too narrow. It concerns itself with the structure of the cinematic sign but does not, according to many contemporary film theorists, pay sufficient attention to the effects of cinema upon the spectator. The semiological model, at least in the ways it was employed in the late sixties and early seventies, was felt to be myopically object-oriented. In order to remedy this putative shortcoming, film theorists resorted to psychoanalysis.

Jean-Louis Baudry's essay "The Apparatus" was a seminal essay in the turn to psychoanalysis. In this essay, he attempts to account for the impres-

sion of reality that cinema is said to impart to spectators. He intends to use psychoanalysis, that is, to analyze what he takes to be a paramount effect of cinema on audiences. However, though the phrase "impression of reality" recurs frequently in "The Apparatus," one must be careful in that which one identifies as the phenomenon with which Baudry is concerned. For Baudry does not contend that the impression of reality caused by cinema is equivalent to our everyday encounters with the world; cinema is not a replication of our ordinary impressions of reality. Rather, cinema is said to deliver an impression of reality that is more-than-real. That is, less paradoxically stated, Baudry wishes to deploy psychoanalysis to explain cinema's intense effect on spectators; he wants to analyze the peculiarly charged relationship we have with the screen when we attend movies.

Moreover, Baudry does not search for this effect by scrutinizing the content of the images or the stories of particular films or even of particular kinds of films. Instead he sees this effect as the product of what he calls "the apparatus," a network which includes the screen, the spectator, and the projector. That is, Baudry seeks the origin of the impression-of-reality effect in the projection situation itself, irrespective of what is being screened.

Baudry's basic procedure for discovering the origin of the impression-of-reality effect is to draw a series of analogies between dreams and the projection context, or, as he prefers to call the latter, the apparatus. He is motivated in this by a belief that dreams like film engender an impression of reality that is highly charged, that is, an impression of what Baudry thinks of as the more-than-real effect. Thus, Baudry hopes to extrapolate the psychoanalytic explanation of the charged impression of reality in dreams into an explanation of the impression of reality in cinema.

Though Baudry does not set out his case in a logically rigorous fashion, his analysis implicitly takes the form of an inductive argument by logical analogy. For example, he notes that the film viewer and the dreamer share the property of having their movements inhibited, that both inhabit darkened rooms, and that both film and dream impart an impression of reality. Dream, in turn, is said to have this consequence insofar as it induces regression to an earlier psychosexual stage, that of primitive narcissism where the self is supposedly not differentiated from the other nor is perception differentiated from representation. On the basis of the similar conditions and effects, respectively, of film and dream, Baudry infers that the impression of reality in film is brought about by a regressive mechanism similar to that operative in dream.

Though arguments by analogy are not absolutely conclusive—they are,

after all, inductive rather than deductive—and though they are often abused, they are a respectable form of reasoning. We use them all the time. For example, if you have a 1964 Saab and I have a 1964 Saab, and both cars are the same model, both engines are in exactly the same condition and state of repair, both carry the same weight, use the same fuel, and have been serviced in the same way by the same mechanic, and my Saab can go 55 mph, then we infer that (probably) your car can go 55 mph. Stated formally, this type of argument takes the following pattern: If we have items A and B, and they are similar in a number of relevant respects, say in terms of properties *p*1 through *px*-1, and item B also has property *px*, then we infer that (probably) A has *px*. That is,

1. Item A has properties *p*1 . . . *px*-1 (e.g., A is a 1964 Saab).
2. Item B has properties *p*1 . . . *px*-1.
3. Item B also has property *px* (e.g., B can go 55 mph).
4. Therefore, (probably) Item A also has property *px*.

Premises 1 and 2 set out the analogy; if more items are being analogized more premises will be added here. Once the analogy is set out, these premises can be combined with premise 3, which states a property known to be possessed by B (but not observed to be a property of A), in order to license the probable conclusion stated in 4. Obviously such arguments gain strength when the number of items and/or the number of relevant properties cited are multiplied. Inversely, the argument loses force as either data base for the analogy is diminished. This can be done by:

> A. showing that the analogies cited fail (for example, your car is really a 1921 Ford, not a 1964 Saab).
> B. demonstrating that the analogies cited are irrelevant to what is at issue (for example, that both cars are green).
> C. noting relevant disanalogies between items A, B . . . in order to challenge the purported similarity of the cases under comparison (for example, that your Saab has no wheels).

With this sketch of the logic of Baudry's approach, we can go on to fill in the details and evaluate the persuasiveness of his account of the psychic mechanism that he believes causes cinema's characteristic impression of reality.

As we have already noted Baudry holds that the conditions of reception of film and dream are analogous; both involve a darkened room and the inhibition of movement. The film viewer sits in his seat; the dreamer lies abed. Inhibited motoricity is also a feature of the infantile state to which the

dreamer is said to regress. Connected to this inhibition of motoricity is another feature: the lack of the means to test reality. Baudry writes:

> In order to understand the particular status of cinema, it is necessary to underline the partial elimination of the reality test. Undoubtedly, the means of cinematographic projection would keep the reality test intact when compared to dreams and hallucination. The subject always has the choice to close his eyes, to withdraw from the spectacle or to leave but no more than dreams does he have means to act in any way upon the object of his perception, change his viewpoint as he would like. . . . His relative motor inhibition which brings him closer to the state of the dreamer, in the same way that the status of the reality he perceives (a reality made up of images) would seem to favor the stimulation of a regressive state, and would play a determining role in the subject-effect of the impression of reality, this more-than-real of the impression of reality, which we have seen is characteristic not of a subject to reality, but precisely of dreams and hallucinations.[8]

Here, Baudry notes that there is only a partial analogy in regard to reality testing between film and dream. But he thinks this similarity is important because along with inhibited motoricity, and perhaps because of it, the lack of reality testing reproduces the conditions of the infantile state of primitive narcissism that explains the impression-of-reality effect that the cinematic apparatus is said to induce. Also, in this passage, Baudry alludes to two other analogies between film and dreams: both traffic in the medium of images and both deliver a more-than-real impression of reality.

So far five analogies between film and dream have been noted: inhibited motoricity in the subject; lack of reality testing; darkened rooms; the medium of images; the more-than-real impression of reality. Are there other analogies?

For Baudry, following the psychoanalyst Bertram Lewin, dreams, like the cinematic apparatus, have screens. That is, Baudry argues that dreams are projections onto dream screens in a way that is analogous to film projection. Baudry writes:

> That dream is a projection reminiscent of the cinematographic apparatus is indeed what seems to come out of Lewin's discovery of the dream-scene, the hypothesis for which was suggested to him by his patients' enigmatic dreams. One young woman's dream, for example: "I had my dream all ready for you, but while I was lying here looking at it, it began to move in circles far from me, wrapped up on itself, again and again like two acrobats." This dream shows that the screen, which can appear by itself, like a white surface, is not exclusively a representation, a content—in which case it would not be necessary to privilege it among other elements of the dream content; but rather it would present itself in all dreams as the indispensable support for the projec-

> tion of images. It would seem to pertain to the dream apparatus. "The Dream screen is a surface on which a dream seems to be projected. It is the 'blank background' (empty basic surface) which is present in the dream although it is not necessarily seen; the manifest content of dream ordinarily perceived takes place over it or in front of it."[9]

Baudry also points out that people often describe their dreams as being like movies.

The dream screen/film screen, dream apparatus/film apparatus analogy is particularly crucial for Baudry. For Lewin has a psychoanalytic account of the dream screen that is pertinent to the effect dreams have upon us. And Baudry intends to extend that account to cinema.

> According to Lewin's hypothesis, the dream screen is the dream's hallucinatory representation of the mother's breast on which the child used to fall asleep after nursing. In this way, it expresses a state of complete satisfaction while repeating the original condition of the oral phase in which the body did not have limits of its own, but extended undifferentiated from the breast.[10]

Thus, via the dream screen, the dreamer regresses to and relives a stage in our psychosexual development marked by primitive narcissism, a stage where self and environment are said to merge and where perception and representation are believed to be undifferentiated. Moreover, this regression satisfies a desire, a desire to return to that sense of undifferentiated wholeness. It is this desire in turn which gives the dream imagery its special charge and which accounts for the intensity with which we regard it.

Insofar as the cinematic apparatus mirrors relevant aspects of the dream apparatus—inhibited motoricity, lack of reality testing, visual imagery, the more-than-real impression of reality, projection, and a screen support—Baudry feels warranted in adopting Lewin's hypothesis about the causation of dream and the dream effect as an explanation of our animating desire for and our experience of the cinematic apparatus. That is, a regressive mechanism seeking to revive the experience of primitive narcissism is what draws us to movies while satisfaction of that desire is what renders that experience more-than-real. So, by postulating the return to primitive narcissism as the operative agency in film spectators, Baudry thinks he has isolated the cause of the cinematic effect while also, in the process, supplying an account of why the movie experience is desirable to us. Later, we shall see, Metz poses a question that the latter point might be thought to answer; that is, Metz asks psychoanalysis to explain why we go to movies. From Baudry's perspective, the answer seems to be to relive that stage of primitive narcissism where all-is-one, including a conflation of perception and representation. Indeed, for Baudry, the cinematic apparatus incarnates a wish for a simula-

tion machine "capable to offer the subject perceptions which are really representations mistaken for perceptions,"[11] thereby recalling the dream state which itself derives from a regression to an archaic state where perception and representation are not differentiated.

Summarizing Baudry's case so far, his argument looks like this:

1. The dream apparatus has the folllowing features: inhibition of movement; lack of reality testing; an imagistic medium; a dark room; projection; a screen; a more-than-real impression of reality; a tendency to efface the distinction between perception and representation.
2. The cinematic apparatus has exactly the same features noted in premise 1.
3. A significant animating force behind the dream apparatus is the desire for and regression to primitive narcissism which enactment causes the charged experience of dreams.
4. Therefore it is probable that a significant animating force behind the cinematic apparatus is the desire for and regression to primitive narcissism which enactment causes the charged experience of cinema.

Baudry, of course, does not hold that films are mistaken for dreams. He rather construes them as simulations of dreams. For this reason he might want to say that the regression encountered in cinema is less intense than that of dreams. Nevertheless, he would appear to hold that to whatever degree the more-than-real impression of reality of film approximates the analogous effect of dreams, it is a function of the process of some measure of regression to the all-is-one state of primitive oral narcissism.

Because of the emphasis Baudry places on the cinematic apparatus as a simulation of unconscious phenomena, specifically of the hallucinatory aura of dreams, one might offer a slightly different interpretation of Baudry's argument than the one just presented. That is, one might take Baudry to be saying that since film replicates the most significant conditions of dreaming—e.g., motor inhibition, lack of reality testing, and so on—it triggers the same effect—regression to primitive narcissism. On this interpretation of Baudry's strategy, the argument rides on the principle: same conditions, same effects. However, whether one chooses this interpretation or the interpretation of the analysis as an inductive argument by analogy is logically indifferent for the purposes of evaluating Baudry's central claims. For in either case Baudry's central assertions stand or fall on the basis of the adequacy of the correlations he draws between cinema and dreams.

Baudry concludes his essay by asserting that the unconscious has an instinctual desire to manifest itself to consciousness. This suggests that

cinema is one means for fulfilling this instinctual desire. For in simulating dream, cinema satisfies the desire of the unconscious for acknowledgment. This somewhat resembles a claim that Metz makes to the effect that by combining elements of night dream and daydream film causes pleasure by externalizing what is usually experienced as internal. But this claim of Baudry's can only be accepted if cinema is a suitable simulation of dreams, that is, if the analogies Baudry draws between film and dream are fitting and if they are not outweighed by significant disanalogies.

However, before turning to an assessment of Baudry's central thesis, it is important to take notice of an elaborate complication in the text which has not been remarked upon so far. Baudry not only analogizes film and dream but he also compares both with the description of the circumstances of the prisoners in Plato's myth of the cave.[12] Those prisoners are chained in a darkened vault. Behind and above them, fires burn. As passersby walk between the prisoners and the flames, the strollers' ambulating shadows are cast upon the wall of the cave. The prisoners see these moving shadows and take them for reality. Through this allegory, Plato sets forth his disparaging estimation of the ordinary person's "knowledge" of the world. It is based on illusion; it is nought but shadowy deception.

Baudry calls attention to the ways in which Plato's cave resembles the cinematic apparatus. The cave is analogous to the apparatus in obvious respects: the motoricity of the prisoners is inhibited as is their capacity to test reality. The cave, like the movie theater, is a dim space. The shadows in Plato's cave might be thought of as projections and the wall of the cave is a screen of sorts. Moreover, the projecting device is above and behind the prisoners and is, so to speak, hidden from them. The imagery in both Plato's cave and the cinema is a matter of shadows or reflections caused by passing something before a light. And in both cases, one can designate the play of "two scenes": first, the scene in the world that gives rise to the "shadows" and second, the scene comprised of the shadows themselves. These analogies lead Baudry to conclude that Plato's myth of the cave "doesn't merely evoke, but quite precisely describes in its mode of operation the cinematographic apparatus and the spectator's place in it."[13]

Now the question immediately arises as to what logical purpose the analogies between Plato's cave and the cinematic apparatus serve in the context of Baudry's overall analysis of film in terms of regression to primitive narcissism. For these added cave analogies do not function logically to enhance Baudry's argument concerning film and dream. The conclusion of that argument is that regression is the motor of the cinematic apparatus just as it is the motor of the dream apparatus. For the analogies with Plato's cave

to film and dream to bolster this conclusion—viz., that regression to primitive narcissism is the motor of the cinematic apparatus—we would have to have reason to claim antecedent knowledge to the effect that Plato's myth was generated by the type of regressive mechanism that the argument wants to attribute to the cinematic apparatus. But we do not have such knowledge. Whether Plato's myth of the cave derives from a regressive desire remains to be proved to the same degree that the cinematic apparatus' origin in such a desire does. That is, the psychoanalytic cause of Plato's myth is not known prior to Baudry's argument and in that sense is logically in the same boat as whatever the animating force behind the cinematic apparatus turns out to be. Thus, adding the analogies of Plato's cave, since the cause of that myth cannot be supplied as a premise of the argument (but, at best, as a corollary conclusion) does not strengthen the argument by analogy between the cinematic apparatus and the dream apparatus. So the question remains as to the point of Baudry's ornate rendition of Plato's myth.

Baudry, of course, has no wish to endorse Plato's epistemological position which he, Baudry, misidentifies as idealism, a label more apt for a post-Cartesian such as Berkeley (that is, Plato does not believe that all that exists is mental and, indeed, the mental/physical distinction relevant to the formation of an idealist philosophy does not appear to have been historically available to Plato). Rather, Baudry tears the myth of the cave out of the context in which it functions as an allegory, and he treats it as a fantasy ripe for psychoanalysis. Among other things, Baudry claims that it is a proto-cinematic wish, that is, a deep-seated wish for something very much like cinema before the invention of cinema. Baudry sees evidence for similar proto-cinematic wishes throughout history: the camera obscura, the magic lantern, the praxinoscope. What Baudry seems to conclude from the existence of a proto-cinema stretching from Plato's cave to the praxinoscope is that it supplies evidence for a transhistorical, psychical, or instinctual source of desire behind the invention of the cinematic apparatus and its prefigurations.[14] And, of course, if the compelling force behind cinema is instinctual, that may supply prima facie grounds for approaching it psychoanalytically. Thus, I take it that the point of Baudry's use of Plato's cave in "The Apparatus" is not to enhance the central argument about the causal relevance of regression to film, but rather to mount a coordinated but independent argument to persuade us that the recent invention of cinema is really a manifestation of a long-standing, transhistorical or instinctual desire of the sort that psychoanalysis is fitted to examine. That is, the discussion of Plato's cave is meant to convince us of the appropriateness of

psychoanalyzing cinema and it is not properly speaking part of the argument by analogy that concludes with the assertion of regression as key to the cinematic apparatus.

Of course, in speaking this way I am offering an interpretation of Baudry's essay, one guided by the logical requirements of the type of argument Baudry appears to advance. I admit that at points Baudry himself writes as though the analysis of the allegory of the cave were an essential part of the film/dream argument. Not only does this fly in the face of the logical point made earlier, but it also promotes many extravagant and confusing, free-associative leaps as Baudry attempts to forge connections simultaneously between Plato's cave, film, and dream. For example, Plato's cave correlates with the darkened room of the movie theater. What connection does this have with dreams? Baudry says that the dreamwork often represents the unconscious by means of underground places.[15] Now even if this has some connection with Plato's cave, what is its relevance to the cinematic apparatus? Films are not characteristically viewed in caves or underground places. The effects of such whimsical flights of fancy can be minimized if we restrict our attention to the central argument that analogizes film and dream which, anyway, is the logical fulcrum of Baudry's case. Thus, a sense of interpretive charity leads me to regard the film/dream argument and the analysis of Plato's cave as making separate though coordinated points.

Undoubtedly, Baudry's essay also attempts to show that the "apparatus" of Plato's cave has the same regressive mechanism behind it as does the dream "apparatus." And Baudry's way of showing this is ostensibly an argument by analogy like that concerning the cinematic apparatus. But this is, logically, a parallel argument to the film/dream argument, one that neither supports nor derives support from the speculations on film and dream. That is, the cave/dream argument concluding with regression as the motor behind Plato's myth is an induction to be pursued independently of the film/dream argument. Indeed, Baudry's discussion of Plato is only relevant to film theorists—as opposed to historians of philosophy—insofar as the myth of the cave can be demonstrated to be proto-cinematic. Thus, I will restrict comment upon Baudry's cave/dream analogies to those points that are relevant to establishing the existence of a proto-cinematic wish.

Baudry's "The Apparatus," then, contains at least two major arguments for film theorists: that the apparatus of cinema importantly involves regression to primitive narcissism and that the archaic wish underlying cinema is atavistic, reaching as far back in history as Plato's myth of the cave. Of these two arguments the former seems to me of greater moment because, if it is true, it is what gives the claim about a proto-cinematic wish precise sub-

stance, and also because it would supply an interesting and substantial insight even if the claims about proto-cinematic wishes were false, i.e., if the invention of cinema responded to a historically recent wish rather than to an ancient longing of the human race.

The argument that the cinematic apparatus involves regression to a period of primitive narcissism where self is not differentiated from the environment is an inductive argument by analogy and, therefore, its conclusions are only probable. This is not problematic for most of what we value as knowledge is at best probable. The degree of warrantibility in such an argument, however, depends on the strength of the analogies cited in the premises and on the presumption that there are not significant disanalogies, in this case between film and dream, which would neutralize or outweigh the persuasiveness of the analogies advanced. Thus, to assess Baudry's thesis we must consider whether his analogies are apt and compelling, and whether or not there are profound disanalogies between film and dream which render Baudry's analogies fledgling.

The two analogies that Baudry repeatedly stresses involve the inhibition of movement and the absence of reality testing, features purportedly shared by the cinematic apparatus and dream. Supposing that these are features of dreams, are they also features of film viewing? The dreamer is asleep; insofar as he is not a somnambulist, his literal movement is restricted to tossing and turning. Of course, his movement capacities as a character in his own dream can be quite expansive. But insofar as he is asleep, the movement of his physical body is involuntary. But what of the cinema viewer?

Conventionally we sit in our seats, moving our heads, arms, and so on within a small perimeter of activity. But is our movement inhibited in a way that is significantly analogous to the inertness of sleep? First of all, a key reason for speaking of motor inhibition, both in terms of sleep and in terms of the infantile state of primitive narcissism, is that in those cases the lack of mobility, for different reasons, is involuntary. However, no matter how sedentary our film viewing is, we are not involuntary prisoners in our seats.

Of course, Baudry speaks of this lack of motoricity not only in respect to film viewing and dreaming, but also with reference to Plato's prisoners whose constraint is involuntary. So the dream state and that of the prisoners correlate along the dimension of involuntary motor inhibition. And movie viewers are supposed to resemble the prisoners. But from this one cannot surmise that it is correct to claim corresponding motor inhibition for movie spectators since movie spectators resemble the prisoners only in such respects as being viewers of reflection and not in terms of involuntariness. Unlike Plato's prisoners, the film viewer can move her head volun-

tarily, attending to this part of the screen and then the next. What she sees comes under her control, unlike the dreamer or the prisoner, in large measure because of her capacity to move her head and her eyes. And, the film viewer, as Baudry admits, can leave the theater, change her seat, or go into the lobby for a smoke.

Though Baudry does not make this move, a proponent of the inhibition analogy might claim that when a film spectator adopts the convention of sitting before the movie screen, she adopts the pretense of having her motor capacities inhibited. But there is no evidence that such a game of make-believe is occurring. A more likely description of what the spectator does when adopting the convention of taking a seat is that she opts for the easiest method of attending to the film. Literally, her motoricity is not inhibited, nor does she feel it or pretend it to be. If we are willing to describe film viewing as involving motor inhibition, we should be equally willing to describe witnessing baseball games and listening to political speeches as involving motor inhibition. And to the extent that such descriptions of baseball and speeches is inaccurate, so is a description of movie viewing as movment inhibited inaccurate. Moreover, even if there is a sense in which we might say that movement in all these cases is "inhibited," it is certainly not a matter of motor inhibition, but a voluntary inhibition promoted by respect for conventional decorum.

Of course, the point that sitting at movies is a social convention is central. Movies can be watched *with no loss of effect* while standing; people frequently walk to the rear of the theater and watch, stand in the aisles while they grab a smoke or relax their bottoms. Nor are such standing filmgoers necessarily stationary; if one watches the film while pacing across a side aisle, the impression the film imparts need not be lost. Baudry connects the putative impression of reality imparted by film to inhibited motoricity. Given this, one would predict that that impression would not occur if the spectator watched while also moving voluntarily. If there is such a phenomenon as the impression of reality, then it should be an empirical matter to establish whether it disappears when the spectator is in movement. In my own case, I have found that I can back out of a movie theater while watching the screen or return to my seat from the beverage bar with no discernible difference in the impressions I derive from the screen when I am seated. I know I'm walking in one case and sitting in the other, but these are proprioceptive impressions and not screen impressions.

Perhaps Baudry would admit that the film viewer's movement is not literally inhibited, but would attempt to save his analogy by saying that the film viewer *feels* inhibited. Phenomenologically, I have never had such an

experience. But even if others do have such experiences, this will not help the analogy that Baudry wishes to draw. Why? Well, if we shift to a phenomenological register, then the dreamer often *feels* in motion when dreaming, for instance, when one dreams one is falling or being pursued by a three-headed ogre. That is, the dreamer often feels in motion when he is not, whereas the film viewer does not ordinarily take himself to be literally in motion when he is not.[16] Of course, Baudry may say that the inhibited movement which is attributed to the movie spectator is really metaphorical. But why should a correlation between his metaphorical description of the film viewer and the literal motor inhibition of the sleeper count as anything more than an entertaining but fanciful piece of equivocation?

Baudry's second key analogy between the cinematic apparatus and dream hinges on the claim that both involve an absence of reality testing. Of course, in one sense, the film viewer is fully capable of indulging in reality testing. He can go up to the screen and touch it; he can shift his view of the screen, noting that the contours around the objects do not alter, and, thereby, he can surmise that the projected array is two dimensional. Also, things like coke bottles and cabbages can be and have been thrown at movies, a dramatic measure for revealing the nature of the screen. Baudry is aware of this; when he speaks of an absence of reality testing in film viewing, his reference is not to an incapacity the viewer has in relation to objects, such as screens, in the actual world; rather Baudry has in mind that the viewer lacks the ability to test reality within the world of the film. That is, the movie viewer cannot enter the visual array onscreen in order to ascertain whether the buildings in *Siegfried* are concrete or merely cardboard.

Baudry also connects lack of reality testing with the inhibition of movement. Plato's prisoners, and the preambulatory infants at the stage of primitive narcissism cannot test reality at a distance because they are immobile. But the same correlation between motor inhibition and absence of reality testing cannot, as Baudry suggests, be extrapolated to film viewing and dreaming. For if there is an absence of reality testing in both these cases, then that is a function of the fact that, *loosely speaking,* there is no reality to be tested *in* the world of the film and the world of the dream (where "reality" is understood as the foil of "representation"). So if the correlation based on absence of reality due to inhibited movement is key to aligning film and dream with the infantile state of primitive narcissism, the analogy is inaccurate.

We may also wish to know whether it is really appropriate to hold that the film viewer has no means for testing reality inside the world of the film.

Certainly it is true that we cannot walk into the world of *Casablanca* in order to determine whether the characters are really drinking whiskey. But at the same time, I think that it pays to recall a really overwhelming disanalogy between film viewing and dreaming. Namely, films are publicly accessible; they can be viewed by more than one person. Moreover, they can be repeated; we can see the same film again and again, and we can fall back on all sorts of evidence—production and distribution records, the testimony of other viewers and of the filmmakers, the existence of similar prints, and so on—to warrant the claim that the film we just saw, say *Captain Blood,* is the same film we saw in the past. This is a radical disanalogy with dreaming. Neither the analyst nor anyone but the dreamer has access to the dream. And no one, including the dreamer, can be sure that his report of a dream is accurate; there is no interpersonel validation available. Even with a "recurring" dream, we have little reason to be confident that the dreamer experienced exactly the same dream from night to night. What does this epistemic disanalogy have to do with reality testing? Simply that with films there is a way in which we can "test reality," i.e., corroborate our experience of a movie. We can ask someone else if she saw what we saw. Nor is this something we do only after a film is over. During *Lifeforce* I leaned over to my neighbor and asked "Did I really just see a vampire-nun?" to which she replied "I saw her too."

There are, in short, means to test the veracity of our experience of films. We cannot plunge into the image, but we can corroborate what we see there, which is the sort of reality testing that is appropriate to visual fictions (as opposed to what might be called ordinary visual "realities"). Moreover, if we are worried about testing the fidelity of documentaries to their subjects, that is also possible. My point here is simply that it seems to me inappropriate to describe the film viewer as lacking the means for testing reality. And if I am right in this matter, this short-circuits Baudry's second key analogy between film and dream. However, if I am wrong and the analogy is acceptable, the considerations I have just raised present another problem for Baudry. For even if in some sense his analogy works, I have also pointed to a major disanalogy between film and dream: viz., that film experiences are open to interpersonal verification. This appears to me to be important enough to outweigh analogies between film and quasi-solipsistic phenomena, since it establishes that film viewing has an objective dimension and is not purely subjective.

Films are a visual medium and so are dreams. Is this a significant analogy between the external and internal phenomena under comparison? Not really. For memories are also often visual. Why not analogize film to

memories as certain film realists might propose? Here, it might be argued that dream is the appropriate analog—that we know to eliminate memory as a viable candidate—because of the earlier analogies that correlate film with dream rather than memory. But as I hope I have shown, those earlier analogies are not so sturdy, nor, I might add, is the film theorist under any imperative to identify *any* mental correlate for film.

However, there is also an important disanalogy between film imagery and dream imagery which indicates that the two are not congruent. The single film image is ordinarily complete, by which I mean that, typically, it is visually articulated throughout. Dream images, on the other hand, tend to be incomplete, foregrounds without backgrounds or figures in a void. This can be simulated in film as can the "noise" of the dreamwork; note Brakhage's films. However, the ordinary film image does not "look like" the ordinary dream image. That is, even if film and dream are imagistic, they are radically dissimilar imagistic media. They are too unlike to be treated as cognate phenomena. Later, as we shall see, Metz notices further, crucial dissimilarities between film and dream,[17] which added to the disanalogies I adduce render Baudry's argument even more unlikely.

Baudry's analogy between film and dream in respect of darkened rooms is also problematic. One can, of course, fall asleep mid-day on the beach. And movies can be viewed in well-lit circumstances. I expect that Baudry is probably right in asserting that most of the time we dream and view films in the dark. But there is still something strange about this correlation. The film viewer is not only objectively in a darkened room; she is experientially aware of being in a darkened room. But even if the dreamer is objectively in a darkened room, she is unaware of it. Indeed, she may believe that she is on a blistering, sun-baked desert. That is, though there is a possible objective analogy between the film viewer and the dreamer, their experiences are disanalogous. Now if a film is supposed to simulate dreams or trigger the same kind of response or mechanism in the subject, wouldn't it seem more likely that what the viewer experiences be key to the dream analogy rather than the objective, physical conditions of reception? That is, the dreamer does not have the same experiential awareness of a darkened room that the film viewer does. So why would the film viewer's awareness of a darkened room remind one of dreaming or simulate dreaming for the unconscious? In this case, Baudry seems to overvalue the significance of correlations between the objective, physical conditions of film viewing and dreaming while forgetting the crucial, phenomenological disanalogies between the film experience and dream experience. We saw that there was a similar problem with his treatment of inhibited motoricity, where he ignored the

fact that objectively, physically leaden sleepers often feel in vigorous motion.

Another analogy that Baudry proposes between film and dream is that both impart what he refers to as a more-than-real impression of reality. Part of the problem with evaluating this claim is the vagueness of the notion of a more-than-real impression of reality. That is, even if film and dream impart such broadly describable impressions, are their respective impressions the same in analytically revealing respects? Both quartz and lemurs can be described as matter but they are matter of such different sorts that the observation does not tell us much that is useful. Are the respective more-than-real impressions proffered by film and dream very alike or very unalike?

Answering this question is difficult since Baudry tells us next to nothing about the phenomena to which he wants to refer. However, if the impressions he has in mind are a matter of imagery charged with affect, we can remark that dream imagery is, if not just more vividly charged, it is at least more invariantly charged than movie imagery. The reason for this, which Metz notes,[18] is that the affect that attaches to dream imagery originates in the dreamer and her personal associations whereas the affect derivable from film imagery comes from an external source—such as the imaginations of screen writers and directors—which may or may not correspond to the film viewer's emotive life. Thus, if the more-than-real impression of reality of films and dreams is identified with a constant correlation of imagery and affect, then the film apparatus and dream are very different. Moreover, if the more-than-real impression of reality is not a matter of a constant coincidence of affect and imagery, what is it? Merely occasionally exciting imagery? But isn't that enough to correlate a televised chess game to dreams?

But there is another way to probe the problems with Baudry's use of the notion of the more-than-real impression of reality. In dream, this impression appears to refer to imagery charged with affect. In film, we are told that this impression is one that diverges from our ordinary encounters with mundane life. And, admittedly, the events we witness on film are most often more exciting, more expressively characterized, and more emotionally arresting than those of quotidian existence. However, it is important to note that films of this sort, though common, are also very special. They are, in the majority of cases, fiction films or they are films otherwise designed explicitly to promote intense affective responses. A film like *Greed,* or *Sunrise,* or *Potemkin,* or *The Passion of Joan of Arc,* may leave an impression that is, as they say, "larger than life." But this sort of impression is not a

function of simply throwing an image on the screen. It is the internal structure of these films that accounts for their effect, not the fact that they are projected. Not all films bestow comparable affective results. Home movies, or bank surveillance footage, especially of persons unknown to us, may appear affectless, flat, and lackadaisical. That is, many films are projected, but few are chosen. Now this is an important point against Baudry. For he claims that the more-than-real impression of which he writes is a consequence of the cinematic apparatus, a claim tantamount to predicting that whatever is projected onscreen will be swathed in affect. But this is downright false; just recall Warhol's *Empire*.

Another major analogy between film and dream that Baudry produces asserts that both have screens, or projection supports. It seems reasonable, barring the complications of TV, to agree that films are *normally* projected onto screens. But frankly the claim seems shaky in regard to dreams. The evidence appears to be that some of Lewin's patients reported dream screens in their nightly reveries. I have no reason to question their reports. However, does this amount to evidence that something like a dream screen is an essential or normal element in all dreams? Perhaps Lewin's patients had personal associations with movie screens and this accounts for the appearance of screens in *their* dreams. Why suppose that a screen element is a characteristic feature of all dreams? Were there visions of screens in dreams before there were screened entertainments? Were there visions of screens in cultures without screened entertainments? And, furthermore, what general criteria are there for establishing that phenomena, like the appearance of a screen in a dream, are organic ingredients of dreaming rather than the associative imagery of given dreams? Until these questions can be satisfactorily answered the dream screen/film screen correspondence—and with it the dream/film apparatus analogy—appear extremely dubious. Of course, as I have already admitted, dream imagery is often incomplete; but where the dream "picture" is unarticulated it is not necessarily the case that the dreamer apprehends a screen, white, silver, or otherwise. There is rather just a void.

So far Baudry's argument by analogy has been attacked by showing that his analogies are hardly compelling and by remarking upon salient disanalogies between film and dream. The accumulated force of these objections shows that Baudry's argument by analogy is without substantial warrant. I think the previously cited disanalogies are enough to swamp his case. But also the premises that set out the analogies between film and dream are virtually without support.[19] Thus, Baudry's argument fails to go through.[20]

Of course, questions, as well, might be raised not only about Baudry's analogies but also about the crucial premise that asserts that the underlying mechanism in dream is regression to primitive, oral narcissism. This is a psychoanalytic claim, not a film theoretical one, and, as such, we should probably not pursue this issue in depth here. Yet, it pays to remember that the Lewin-Baudry hypothesis about regression is extremely controversial.

The regression hypothesis appears to ride upon the postulation of a dream screen which, in turn, can be associated with a mother's breast. The evidence for a dream screen as an organic, essential, or merely characteristic element of dreaming has already been challenged. Insofar as the dream screen serves as a linchpin for the inference of regression, and insofar as the dream screen phenomenon is not generic, then there is no evidence for a generic regressive mechanism, of the specificity Baudry claims, in dreaming.

Also one must at least question the purported screen/breast association. What is its basis? And how extensive is it? Maybe some white people envision breasts as white and then go on to associate the latter with white screens. But not everyone is white. And I even wonder if many whites associate breasts and screens. Certainly it is not an intuitively straightforward association like that between guns and penises. For example, screens are flat; and lactating breasts are not. A screen is, ideally, uniform in color and texture; but a breast has a nipple. Nor will the association work if it is put forward by saying that breasts are, for the infant in the state of oral regression, targets of projections as are screens. For according to the theory of primitive narcissism, the mother's breasts are part of an undifferentiated, all-is-one experience, and, therefore, could not have been recognized way back then by the primitive narcissist, and, thus, cannot be recalled now to be targets of projection. For primitive narcissism admits no distinctions between targets of projections, projections, and projectionists.

I do not deny that there may be some people who associate screens and breasts, thereby at least suggesting the hypothesis of oral regression in those cases. After all, it is probably psychologically possible to associate anything with anything else. But even if some people associate breasts and screens, that does not provide enough evidence to claim a general pattern of association between breasts and dreams such as might support a theory about all dreaming. And if oral regression is not the general causal force energizing the dream, then it cannot be extrapolated by analogy as the causal force behind the cinema apparatus.

Baudry's central argument in "The Apparatus" is beset by problems at every turn. Do his subsidiary arguments fare any better? By analogical

reasoning, he links Plato's myth of the cave with dreaming, and also with filmgoing, inferring that all three can be explicated by reference to regression. Plato's cave, furthermore, is identified as proto-cinematic, indicating, to Baudry, that the instinctual desire that propels filmgoing is ancient.

The analogies between Plato's prisoners and dreamers are rather weak, often in ways reminiscent of the problems with Baudry's film/dream analogies. Both prisoners and dreamers are said to be immobile, in a darkened place, bombarded with visual imagery, and unable to test reality. Contra Baudry, we must note again, with reference to darkened places, that people can sleep and dream in broad daylight, while the "world of the dream" need not be dark. And, as was pointed out earlier, the dreamer as a character in a dream need not be immobile, while the sleeper, unlike Plato's prisoners, is unaware of being immobile. Also, what Plato's prisoners see differs radically from the dreamer's imagery—i.e., Plato's prisoners see uniformly black figures whose only features are shadowy contours rather than internally articulated figures with eyes and moustaches. And, of course, Plato's prisoners are awake while dreamers are not, which reminds us that Plato's prisoners do literally see something—even if they misinterpret it—and this indicates that they can objectively correct each other about the look of the shadows before them, a type of reality testing not available to the dreamer. One could go on at length discounting Baudry's dream-analysis of Plato, but this appears to be more of an issue for historians of philosophy, if it is an issue for anyone, than for film theorists. So let the preceding, hurried refutation of Baudry's version of Plato's cave suffice.

Baudry also claims that Plato's myth of the cave is a prefiguration of cinema. Needless to say this ignores the philosophical purposes Plato designed the myth to serve. But Baudry believes that the myth evinces a myth deeper than Plato was aware of. Baudry holds that Plato's cave is proto-cinematic, which leads him to claim that cinema answers a desire of ancient, instinctual origins. Many, more historically minded, film theorists might wish to question the existence of transhistorical, transcultural desires of the sort Baudry postulates. Nor is the existence of such a transcultural desire absolutely integral to the project of psychoanalyzing the cinematic apparatus. For cinema might be the answer to culturally specific desires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Baudry's analogies between the cinematic apparatus and Plato's cave are underwhelming. Both, purportedly, involve projection from behind the spectator. But films are often rear-projected and early Japanese cinemas positioned their audiences at right angles to the projection apparatus (not to mention the possibility of projecting films via large video screens). Are

either of these practices uncinematic or do audiences at, for example, rear-projected movies have different film experiences than those at cinemas with projectors behind the audience. Baudry speaks of the projection in the cave and in cinema as hidden. But film projection is not always hidden. One can set up a projector in one's living room or in a classroom or boardroom, for all to see, and still have a typical film experience. We have already noted the film viewer is not necessarily immobile. Plato's prisoners are shackled at the neck; even the seated film viewer can move her head. Furthermore, the images of film are immensely different than Plato's shadows. The prisoners see solid black blotches on the wall while film viewers see internally articulated pictures. How, for example, could Plato's prisoner see the eyes of one of the people who cast the shadows on their wall? And isn't this disanalogy far more striking than the analogies that Baudry defends?

Plato's prisoners cannot enter the world of the shadows for purposes of reality testing and neither can viewers of *Casablanca* belly up to Rick's bar for a fast Scotch. But, on the other hand, film viewers can touch the screen, and what is more important, they are aware that there is a screen, and that they are watching a movie. Thus, their status, epistemologically, is exactly opposite that of Plato's prisoners. Also, I think we would agree that one could see a film that portrayed the world accurately whereas Plato's shadow representations are putatively always deceptive. There are surely some surface resemblances between Plato's prisoners and film viewers—they both see projections. But this is hardly sufficient for supporting the claim that both film and the myth of the cave address the same psychic need and mobilize the same psychic mechanism.

Baudry believes that Plato's cave is part of the prehistory of cinema. Apart from the inductive weakness of the analogies he draws, there is also something strained in Baudry's use of the notion of the prehistory of cinema. Is every instance and/or report of shadow projection, prior to 1895, to be considered part of the prehistory of cinema? What criteria determine that which we are to count as legitimately and four-squaredly part of the prehistory of cinema? The camera obscura, Marey's repeating camera, the praxinoscope, and Muybridge's battery of cameras are clear-cut examples of what people include in the prehistory of cinema. And it is easy to see that what these devices have in common is that they can figure in causal accounts of the invention of cinema. But there is no historical argument in sight to show that Plato's myth of the cave literally played a role in the invention of cinema. Thus, even if Baudry's analogies were more convincing, it is not clear that it would be appropriate to consider Plato's cave as part of the prehistory of cinema.

The central argument, as well as the subsidiary ones, in "The Apparatus" appear, upon scrutiny, to be utterly groundless. Undoubtedly, some readers may complain that my methods of examining Baudry's hypotheses are not suitable and perhaps even boorish. For in my account, Baudry is making a series of literal, logical, scientific claims about a causal process. Thus, Baudry's conclusions are assessed with the rigor one would apply to any scientific hypothesis. However, many contemporary film theorists might object that Baudry is doing something more "interesting" or "important" than pedestrian science.

Personally, I find it difficult to see why a claim about the isolation of a causal mechanism (in this case, regression as a motor force behind cinema) should not be treated as a scientific hypothesis. And so treated, Baudry's arguments by analogy are woefully inept; he fails to consider significant disanalogies, while the analogies he presents are loose and superficial. But many contemporary film theorists, especially those with backgrounds in literature, may counter that that which I call "loose" and "superficial" is really graceful, imaginative, and ingenious. They admire Baudry, as they admire Barthes, for his supposed expertise in belle lettres. But however seductive to some literary sensibilities "The Apparatus" may be, contemporary belle lettres does not afford the means to defend causal claims about the processes underlying cinema. Film theorists with backgrounds in literature may bewail this fact; but it is unavoidable. Moreover, as we shall see, the confusion of belle lettres, on the one hand, with scientific and philosophical reasoning, on the other, is one of the most egregious problems in contemporary film theory. Indeed, the extremely detailed, literal-minded, and argumentive style of this chapter and of the rest of this book is mandated by my conviction that contemporary film theorists, with their penchant for belletristic expression, including slippery analogies and metaphors, must be shown that they are using the wrong tools for the tasks at hand.

METZ'S IMAGINARY SIGNIFIER

Christian Metz was the leading theorist of the first semiology. At the same time, his essay "The Imaginary Signifier" was one of the seminal contributions in the transition to the second semiology. In this essay, Metz attempts to deploy psychoanalysis in order to explain both why people go to the cinema, and how people are able to assimilate the rules and conventions of cinema. Thus, like other practitioners of the second semiology, Metz is motivated toward psychoanalysis as a means of investigating the conditions of cinematic reception. Metz's purview has expanded from his earlier, quasi-Saussurean concentration on the structure of the cinematic

sign to a concern with cinematic signification as it interacts with spectators. Yet Metz does not regard the adoption of psychoanalysis as making a totally radical departure from his earlier more classical, semiotic stance. For psychoanalysis, he believes, like semiology, studies signification. Psychoanalysis supplements semiology narrowly construed. Psychoanalysis can be employed to continue the study of cinema in new areas.

Similarly, other practitioners of the second semiology agree that the mobilization of psychoanalysis is not a research program that is discontinuous with the Saussurean one. For the variant of psychoanalysis most frequently endorsed by psychosemiologists is Lacanian. And since Lacanian psychoanalysis has pretensions to linguistics à la Saussure, the transition to the second semiology is not conceived by its proponents to be a rejection of the earlier phase but an expansion thereof.

"The Imaginary Cinema" proposes to tell us why we attend films and how we are able to understand them by maintaining that cinema has roots in certain unconscious phenomena, notably: imaginary identification, voyeurism, fetishism, and disavowal. The way that Metz identifies a species of unconscious phenomenon as a root for cinema is by analogy. That is, an unconscious phenomenon is a root or prototype of cinematic experience where the unconscious phenomenon in question evinces an analogous structure in what is called the *play of presence and absence,* as does a correlative species of cinematic experience. Once Metz proposes a type of unconscious phenomenon as a root or prototype of cinema, he can go on to use it to answer his central questions. That is, in some cases, Metz can account for our desire for cinema by suggesting that the medium can afford, in some measure, whatever presumable pleasures, satisfaction of desire, and compelling force that the psychic phenomena he has isolated provide the unconscious; while, in other cases, Metz can argue that we are able to comprehend various cinematic practices in virtue of their having the pertinent and analogous psychic processes, structures, and syndromes as psychic prototypes. In other words, we understand various cinematic structures and phenomena because we have already encountered them in the course of our psychosexual development.

Though the point of "The Imaginary Signifier" is really quite simple, the essay is very difficult to read. One reason for this is that the essay does not set out its central argument until it is nearly half finished. The piece opens with meandering ruminations about cinéphilia, emphasizing its dangers for film theorists, and with elaborate statements of Metz's specific semiological and psychoanalytic allegiances. One plows through over thirty pages before we know where the essay is going.

Metz is at pains to differentiate his deployment of psychoanalysis from

other lines of cinematic research that might also invoke psychoanalysis. For example, a psychoanalytically inclined film scholar might analyze the personality of a filmmaker through his works, relating Hitchcock's attitude to authority, say, to his relation to his father. Since Hitchcock's father was a grocer, such a study might be initiated by examining the violence done to and by means of food in Hitchcock's films. Or a scholar might attempt to derive a typology of directorial syndromes, outlining the structure of Langian paranoia or the Wellesian obsession with power. But Metz rejects these two approaches as theoretical options because they are concerned with authors rather than the cinematic signifier. Yet another option might be to employ psychoanalysis in the study of individual films conceived of as textual systems. However, this approach, as well, does not come to grips with the cinematic signifier as such, i.e., with the nature of cinema apart from the unique characteristics of individual textual systems. Alternatively, Metz writes "Another approach—the one I have had in view and have now reached—consists of a direct examination, outside any particular film, of the psychoanalytic implications of the cinematic."[21]

That is, Metz intends to isolate the film specific features and effects of cinematic representation, and, then, to assess what psychoanalysis can reveal about cinema by applying psychoanalysis to film's distinctive characteristics. Specifically, Metz wants to unearth the psychic significance of the essential feature of cinema in such a way that our questions about why we go to films and how we understand films will be answered. Here it is extremely important to note that though at times Metz has eschewed essentialism, his methodology in "The Imaginary Signifier" is essentially essentialist.

Metz's candidate for the essential feature of cinema is derived primarily through a contrast with theater. Here, the essential, differentiating feature between the two media, which captures Metz's attention, is that in cinema what he calls the signifier involves a unique play of presence and absence. That is, the cinematic signifier, or representation, is present to the spectator (e.g., an *image* of a locomotive), but what it signifies or refers to (viz., the locomotive itself) is absent, i.e., it is not in the screening room. This is thought to contrast with theater where a character or a prop is represented by something that is actually present to the audience, e.g., a living actor or a chair. Metz contends

> . . . what is true of Sarah Bernhardt is just as true of an object, a prop, a chair, for example. On the theater stage, this chair may, as in Chekhov, pretend to be a chair in which the melancholy Russian nobleman sits every evening; on the contrary (in Ionesco), it can explain to me that it is a theater chair. But

> when all is said and done it is a chair. In the cinema, it will similarly have to choose between two attitudes (and many other intermediate or more tricky ones), but it will not be there when spectators see it, when they have to recognize the choice; it will have delegated its reflection to them.[22]

Having identified the play of presence and absence as the unique feature of cinematic representation, Metz looks to psychoanalysis in order to review what it has to tell us about the play of presence and absence, especially with regard to our relations or potential relations to visual arrays where those are marked by a play of presence and absence analogous to that purportedly found in cinema. Metz finds analogous themes of presence and absence in four types of psychic phenomena: imaginary identification, voyeurism, disavowal, and fetishism. Metz proceeds to attempt to illuminate the cinematic experience by reference to these psychic phenomena conceived of as prototypic analogs to the cinematic experience.

The first analog that Metz finds for the cinematic experience of the play of presence and absence is imaginary identification. This phenomenon is a crucial element in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a topic we will consider in greater detail in the next chapter. In the present context, it is important to recall that, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, one of the momentous points in our psychosexual development is what is called the mirror stage. Purportedly, at around eighteen months of age, the child acquires a powerful sense of identity during an encounter with its own mirror image. The child derives its sense of identity by identifying with its own reflection, an experience occasioned by jubilance and a sense of perceptual mastery. Cinematic representation is somewhat analogous to this seminal experience since what is reflected onscreen and in the mirror is not literally the source, i.e., the very referent itself, of the reflection. That is, the image is present but the referent is absent from the reflection itself.

What can this analogy be used to explain about cinema? First, presumably the encounter at the cinema with a dynamical relationship of presence and absence similar to that of the mirror stage triggers a corresponding sense of perceptual mastery, thereby accounting for some of the pleasure we derive from cinema.

Second, the invocation of the mirror stage explains why, according to Metz, film viewers identify with the camera. This, in turn explains, why we so readily accept certain cinematic conventions, such as camera pans.[23] But actually the engendering of identification with the camera explains much more for Metz. For he believes that all communication requires identification of some sort in order to be intelligible. Thus by triggering identification with the camera, through the play of presence and absence (which

harkens back to the mirror stage), a film secures a necessary condition for appearing intelligible. Metz says

> But *with what,* then, does the spectator identify during the projection of the film? For certainly he has to identify: identification in its primal form has ceased to be a current necessity for him, but he continues, in the cinema—if he did not the film would become more incomprehensible than the most incomprehensible films—to depend on that permanent play of identification without which there would be no social life (thus, the simplest conversation presupposes the alternation of the *I* and the *you,* hence the aptitude of the two interlocutors for a mutual and reversible identification). What form does this *continued* identification, whose essential role Lacan has demonstrated even in the most abstract reasoning and which constituted the "social sentiment" for Freud . . . take in the special case of one social practice among others, the cinematic projection?
>
> Obviously the spectator has the opportunity to identify with the character of the fiction. But there still has to be one. This is thus only valid for the narrative representational film, and not for the psychoanalytic constitution of the cinematic signifiers as such.[24]

What is the object of identification of the cinematic sign as such? By a process of elimination, Metz concludes it is the camera. This is an identification facilitated by the replication of the conditions of identification—i.e., the play of presence and absence—of that primal moment of identification, the mirror stage. This process of identification with the camera is called (by Metz) "imaginary," named after a faculty for identification, the Imaginary, which Lacan alleges is acquired at the mirror stage. Insofar as cinema reactivates this faculty, it is an imaginary signifier.

Along with the pleasures of perceptual mastery, the cinematic play of presence and absence also supposedly affords voyeuristic pleasure. According to Metz, cinema recapitulates the theme of presence and absence involved in voyeurism insofar as the film spectator is absent from the fictional world of the movie. She wears, as Hofmannsthal would have it, a cloak of invisibility. Metz claims that in contradistinction to the theater, where the actor is aware of the presence of the audience, the film spectator is not present to the film actor. Metz adds to this that film viewing, like voyeurism, is experienced in an essentially solitary way whereas theater is a far more communal experience.[25]

The psychic phenomena of disavowal is also correlated to the cinematic play of presence and absence. "Disavowal" refers to the supposed infantile coming to terms with castration. A male both believes but does not believe that females have penises—or alternatively, that they both are and are not castrated. This capacity for believing something is present while knowing it

is absent really underwrites the cinematic experience for Metz. This is how we can react as though Sylvester Stallone is before us when we know that he is not. Disavowal is the mechanism that makes this possible, thereby enabling us to comprehend cinema's most basic convention.[26]

Connected to the psychic phenomena of disavowal is that of fetishism. In place of the fantasized absent penis of the female, the fetishist finds an object—a foot, for instance—that stands for the missing phallus. In film, Metz believes, the absence of the image, the referent, is compensated for, emotionally, by technique. This displacement is not only mobilized by cinéphiles but by all filmgoers insofar as they esteem the well-madeness of a movie. Metz asserts:

> The cinema fetishist is the person who is enchanted at what the machine is capable of, at the *theater of shadows* as such. For the establishment of his full potency for cinematic enjoyment he must think at every moment (and above all simultaneously) of the force of presence the film has and of the absence on which this force is constructed. He must constantly compare the result with the means deployed (and hence pay attention to the technique), for his pleasure lodges in the gap between the two. Of course, this attitude appears most clearly in the "connoisseur," the cinéphile, but it also occurs, as a partial component of cinematic pleasure, in those who just go to the cinema: if they do go it is partly in order to be carried away by the film (or the fiction, if there is one), but also in order to *appreciate* as such the machinery that is carrying them away: they will say when they have been carried away that the film was a "good" one, that it was "well made" (the same thing is said in French of a harmonious body).[27]

"The Imaginary Signifier" is constantly cited by practitioners of the second semiology. For though it is not overly concerned with ideology, its emphasis on cinema's effects on the spectator is compatible with the direction of analysis that ideological analysis is currently supposed to take. But though "The Imaginary Signifier" is accepted as authoritative, it is an extremely problematic work.

Metz's method is hardly clear. Having identified film's essential feature, Metz searches for the occurrence of the analogous theme—that of the play of presence and absence—among psychic phenomena. But what principles of selection lead Metz to exactly the four (rather heterogeneous) phenomena he arrives at? Are there only four correlations? In answer to this, Metz may say that he never claimed exhaustiveness. But, apart from this trifling issue, it must be observed that the manner of the way in which Metz moves from the essence of cinema to his analogous psychic prototypes is murky.

There are no uniform, consistent principles stated that enable us to

reason smoothly from the essence of film to Metz's favored psychic phenomena. The notion of the play of presence and absence is not applied univocally throughout the essay. In the treatment of voyeurism, for example, the relevant absent element is the spectator who is not party to the world of the film and who watches unobserved as Gregory Peck blows up the guns of Navarone. But in Metz's other analyses what is significantly absent is the source of the film's imagery—the guns of Navarone, for example. Indeed, using concepts as vague as "presence" and "absence" with little or no attention to what is present or absent in each case, allows for correlations that seem no more than equivocating sleights-of-hand. And, furthermore, why is it that when we come to fetishism, we are no longer speaking of presence, but of the *force of presence?*

However, the lack of an explicitly stated, consistently applied method is the least of Metz's problems. Greater difficulties arise with Metz's essentialism. First, one wonders whether he is correct in isolating the essence of cinema primarily by a contrast with theater. Aren't the characters of novels, such as Emily in *Mysteries of Udolpho,* as absent to the reader in Metz's sense as E.T., Mighty Joe Young, and Johnny Ringo are to the filmgoer? Metz will undoubtedly say that he is working with the species of multi-channeled visual arts and that he is seeking the differentia of cinema in that class. But we shall see that it is his forgetfulness of the art of fiction that makes his proposed differentiation between theater and cinema problematic.

Metz's account of the differential play of presence and absence in film as contrasted to theater is suspect. For if we are speaking of fiction—i.e., fiction films and fictional plays—then, ontologically, Shylock is no more present to the theater spectator than Fred C. Dobbs is present to the film viewer. Neither Shylock nor Fred C. Dobbs can be hit by a disapproving spectator with a dissenting tomato. I may stop a performance of *Hamlet* by running onstage just as I might stop a showing of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* by plunging into the screen. But I cannot prevent Gertrude's death nor cure Francis. I can't reach out and touch one of the yellow bricks on the road to Oz; but then I can't wear Lear's crown either. Once we are considering the realm of fiction, it makes no sense to speak of the differences between cinema and theater in terms of what is absent to the spectator. In both fictional film and theatrical fiction, the characters are absent from the continuum of our world in the same way.

There is no reason to think that the theoretical distinction between theater and film can be drawn in the way that Metz desires, especially when we recall that what Metz has in mind are fictions. The issue of presence and absence which Metz raises has no relevance where what is being communi-

cated is first and foremost fictional. Admittedly, barring such cases as cartoons in film and shadow play in theater, Metz's comments about presence and absence have some connection to the most typical ways of producing images in film and theater. But this contingent fact about the way these fictional images are caused to be is of no ontological moment. Nor is it clear why these features of the production of fictional images should have any psychological repercussions, particularly when what the audiences in both film and theater are primarily concerned with are fictional worlds.[28]

Further difficulties beleaguer Metz's analyses of the interrelations and analogies between film and his supposed psychic prototypes. Even if, for the moment, we ignore the question of whether the operative Lacanian account of imaginary identification has a secure scientific foundation, we still have more than enough to trouble us with Metz's characterization of it in regard to film. Why, one wonders, if there is a faculty of the Imaginary would it be triggered by film? An encounter with a film is so different, physically and phenomenologically, from an encounter with a mirror. We do not see ourselves reflected from the silver screen. And even if we are Richard Burton or Elizabeth Taylor, we do not see ourselves behaving or looking as we are in the screening room as our celluloid simulacrum unfolds. Metz appears to be aware of these disanalogies yet he pushes on with the account of imaginary identification. I don't understand why.

Perhaps it will be argued that in our culture the mirror is a metaphor for visual representations such as painting, drama, and cinema. Hamlet advises the players to hold a mirror up to nature. But why should this conceit cause imaginary identification? Is our unconscious moved by literary images, unspoken in the film? And what of spectators unfamiliar with this cultural association? In any case, it is strange to think that such a cultural association could stand in the place of the putative causal conditions of imaginary identification.

Of course, it is undoubtedly the metaphoric association of mirrors with certain types of art that attracted film scholars to Lacanian psychoanalysis in the first place, since talk of mirror identification could be segued, in an equivocating fashion, with the conceit that somehow film is a visual process exactly like mirroring. But this, lamentably, only shows that much contemporary film theory is precariously based on metaphors. It does not show that something as radically different from my mirror image of myself as a film of somebody else can serve as the efficient cause that mobilizes my supposed faculty of the Imaginary in a way analogous to the alleged, primal mirror experience.

Nor does Metz appear on target when he describes our relation to the camera in terms of identification. If I truly identified with the camera, I suppose that I would experience the entire visual array of the projection as coextensive with my visual field. Yet, when I look at a film image, I only focus on part of it, usually upon what is represented in the foreground or upon that quadrant of the screen where the primary action of the narrative transpires. That is, often the camera's field of view is broader than mine; my field of vision is not coextensive with its field of vision. Moreover, this disparity is frequently used by film directors in a way that brings it to our attention forcefully. In a horror film, the monster may be brought into the soft-focused background of the shots just moments before the audience sees it. The creature is visible onscreen before we are aware of it. But how can it be that we identify with the camera when it "sees" more than we do?

Furthermore, it seems to me that we are often made aware of the fact that the camera sees more than we do. In the deep-focus, realist style of cinema theorized by Bazin, the spectator discovers important dramatic details in the background of shots. This is a standard source of aesthetic pleasure in film. But that sense of discovery hinges on finding something that was already in the camera's field of vision. We could not savor this sense of discovery if we took the camera's field of vision to be coextensive with our own. For there would be nothing for us to discover visually.

Another way to make this point is to consider offscreen sound. Ordinarily, when I hear a noise close by I turn my head to identify its source. However, it is quite common in film to register an adjacent offscreen sound—e.g., the unearthly growls of some fiend or madman—without cutting to a view of the source of the sound. Insofar as this is at variance with our customary perceptual practices, we are aware that the camera's "perception" is not ours, and identification with the camera would appear to be blocked. The audience viewing Fritz Lang's *M* is obviously aware that the camera is defying their normal pathway of vision by keeping Peter Lorre just off camera for roughly the first half of the film. How can they be said to identify visually with that which palpably frustrates their characteristic perceptual reflexes. Nor is this use of offscreen sound esoteric; it occurs throughout popular films as well as art films.

Of course, one might drop the idea that one identifies with the camera. But Metz can't. For we have seen that Metz holds that all communication requires a subtending process of identification. And he argues that camera identification is the most plausible candidate for this role when it comes to film. It is this commitment to the necessity for identification that drives Metz to explain film reception in terms of imaginary identification with the

camera. But I think that it is outlandish to accept the general supposition that every communication, in order to be intelligible, requires some subtending process of identification. I overhear a department store sales attendent tell a pregnant woman that maternity clothes are on the second floor. I understand these remarks, I find them intelligible, without in any meaningful sense of the word *identifying* with either the attendant or the woman. And even if identification were necessary it would be hard to come up with compelling reasons why I would have to identify with the attendant rather than the woman, or vice versa. Perhaps it will be argued that we must identify with both; I find it more theoretically efficacious to say we identify with neither.

Metz's account of voyeurism in cinema is as confused as his account of imaginary identification. Undoubtedly voyeurism can be made a pressing issue in the context of specific films. One thinks of *Rear Window, The Conversation, Blow-up,* and *Blow-out.* But Metz believes that voyeurism is relevant to the operation of all films. Why? Because the film spectator is not in the presence of the film performer, which suggests that the film spectator is viewing unobserved. This, as has already been stressed, inexplicably reverses the way in which Metz usually discusses the play of presence and absence. But the analogy between the film spectator and the voyeur also seems wrong. Metz asks us to think of the film actor as if he were unaware that he is the object of an ontologically absent audience—this in contradistinction to the stage actor who is conscious of the presence of a breathing audience in front of him and who is complicit in their act of watching. The authentic conditions of voyeurism for Metz appear to require a victim who does not know he is being watched. The film actor purportedly approximates this state but the stage actor does not. But does this make any sense? Surely every film actor in typical films is playing for an audience—quite knowingly I might add. Film actors are in no way like unwary apartment dwellers who accidently leave their curtains open and who are victimized by prying eyes. Film actors are just as complicit as stage actors in their exhibition of themselves for popular consumption. Nor would it help matters to say that film viewing is a situation in which the spectator pretends to be voyeuristic, for how, in principle, could we be stopped from mounting the same argument about theater viewing? And in any case, I, at least, doubt that we usually *pretend* to be voyeurs at either movies or theatrical spectacles. That would require a mental act that I am sure we would all remember.

Metz claims that, like voyeurism, cinema is experienced as solitary whereas theater viewing is communal.[29] This observation is arrestingly parochial. Perhaps film viewing in first-run cinemas in Paris is privatized.

But, for example, ghetto audiences and teenage audiences (in the United States at least) treat movies as opportunities for communal participation. They crack jokes loudly at the expense of the film, currying the approval of fellow viewers; they try to scare each other with premature screams; they shout out criticisms and offer advice to the characters. The audience with whom I watched *Halloween* kept warning Jamie Lee Curtis to stop dawdling and to get out of that house pronto. Also, middle-class adult audiences, as encountered in upper east side theaters in New York City, are quite communal, talking to each other very audibly throughout the film. Indeed, in my experience communal interaction is far more common, in America, during movie screenings than during theatrical performances (though this does not prompt me to say theatrical spectatorship is solitary). Metz does say that his observations in "The Imaginary Signifier" are not cross-culturally valid, and that they apply only to Western moviegoing. But that caveat cannot be used to evade the preceding counter-examples. For these examples are Western and they indicate that, among certain groups of Western audiences, movies present an occasion for communal participation or at least for a kind of raucousness which aims at mutual recognition.

Nor is Metz's characterization of film fetishism particularly persuasive. There may in fact be some film fetishists. But I question whether all film viewing involves fetishism. Putatively a fetishist fastens upon one object in order to deny the absence of another object in whose presence the fetishist has a stake. But what is the relevant absent object in the case of cinematic representation? According to Metz, what is absent is whatever had been filmmed—the desert, for example, in *Lawrence of Arabia*. But how many viewers of the latter film have a stake in the presence of the desert, and what might that stake be?

Indeed, it is just implausible to attribute to normal spectators a desire for the actual presence, in the screening room, of the objects, persons, and events that they see represented on film. Consider what the desire to be in the presence of the absent objects of certain films would amount to: being amidst bullets whizzing by in *Scarface;* amidst cascading glass in *The Poseidon Adventure;* amidst an attack of driver ants in *The Naked Jungle*. What normal viewer literally has a stake in inhabiting such prospects?

Moreover, the supposed desire, that Metz postulates, of the viewer for the actual presence of the referents of cinematic representations, is at variance with one of the most crucial features of representation. That is, as Aristotle and Arthur Danto have stressed, we are interested in the representations of things in ways that we would not be interested in the things that serve as the pretexts for the representations. We are, for example, interested

in still lifes of dead fish and not in the dead fish that modeled for them. Representations facilitate cognitive and emotive responses that their referents "in nature" do not. Given this easily documented function of representation, is it likely that what consumers of representation really have a stake in is the actual presence of the referent of the cinematic representation in the screening room? Metz's account of the audience's desire for the presence of the absent referent conflicts with the cognitive and emotive purposes for which we seek out representations rather than the "real things" they portray. And surely we have more grounds for accepting the latter account of representation than we do for accepting Metz's postulation of arcane fetishistic desires.

Furthermore, what is the basis of the psychoanalytic association that links film techniques as the substitute for the absent cinematic object? When a foot fetishist substitutes a female's foot as a replacement for the allegedly missing female penis two factors motivate the choice of symbol: first, a sort of rough resemblance of the foot to the male organ and second a metonymic relation, i.e., the foot is on the itinerary of the male gaze as it travels up the female's body toward the genitals. But what motivating factors promote the replacement of the absent planet Jupiter by the camera movements in the "Star Gate" sequence of *2001*?

In connection with film fetishism, Metz says it is the process of disavowal that enables the film viewer to believe that the objects that cause the image are present despite the fact that the spectator knows they are not. Some such process as disavowal might be operative if it were appropriate to say that in some sense film viewers characteristically believed, while simultaneously disbelieving, that Robert DeNiro is in the screening room with them. But Metz has supplied no reason to postulate the existence of this contradictory state in spectators. Specifically, he has not shown that spectators in any way believe that the objects and persons shown in film are really before them, "in the flesh," so to speak.

We shall see that there is a general tendency in contemporary film theory to maintain that film spectators are rapt in the illusion that what is represented—the cinematic referents—are really present. This presumption will be attacked throughout this book. In contrast, my own position is that the spectator is aware that she is watching a film and does not mistake the images for their referents. With movies we generally focus our attention upon what is represented, though we are aware in a subsidiary way that it is a representation to which we are attending. Rather than saying that we believe and simultaneously disbelieve in the presence of the cinematic referent, I would say, following Polanyi, that our mode of attention is

better characterized by way of two, simultaneous, ***nonconflicting*** modes of awareness: a ***focal*** mode, directed at what is being represented, and a ***subsidiary*** mode, through which we remain constantly aware that what is before us is a representation. And if this characterization captures our relation to cinematic representation, then we have no need to hypothesize the operation of disavowal in film viewing for these states of consciousness—focal and subsidiary—are not contradictory states of belief such that one of them must be disavowed in order for the organism to maintain equilibrium. That is, our relationship to the screen in terms of awareness is not analogous to the fetishist and does not, therefore, call forth a corresponding process of disavowal.

METZ'S DAYDREAMS

Metz's "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator" might be read as a corrective to Baudry's "The Apparatus." For Metz acknowledges certain crucial limitations of the analogy between night dreams and films. However, he believes that certain fundamental insights of the analogical approach can be sustained by reorienting the analogy by linking film and daydream. This allows him to conclude that part of our desire for cinema resides in its capacity to externalize inner processes. He writes: "This is the specific joy of receiving from the external world images that are usually internal images, images that are familiar or not very far from familiar, of seeing them inscribed in a physical location (the screen)."[30]

This recalls Baudry's conclusion that through the cinematic apparatus the unconscious manifests itself insofar as film simulates the dream. This is gratificatory, signaling a return or manifestation of the repressed. That is, one consequence that both Metz and Baudry draw from their analogies between film and mental phenomena is that in simulating the unconscious, film satisfies an unconscious desire that its internal processes be externalized.

In "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator," Metz embarks on a lengthy examination of the analogies and disanalogies between film, daydream, and night dream. As already noted, the analogy between film and night dream has been with us at least since the twenties. And, of course, it is echoed in popular idioms such as the "Hollywood Dream Factory." Some of the grounds for the film/night dream analogy which Metz cites include that both phenomena involve a darkened room, diminished mobility, involuntary reception, and, purportedly, lowered wakefulness. However, Metz also notes a number of strong disanalogies between film and night dream:

the film spectator almost always knows that he is at the movies, whereas the dreamer does not usually know he is dreaming; film perception is *real*—there actually is an external reflection on the screen—whereas dream perception is not real in this sense; film narratives are more rational than dream narratives; and, connected to the preceding disanalogy, film is less viable as a source of hallucinatory wish-fulfillment than one's own dreams.

On the other hand, the brunt of these disanalogies can be tempered somewhat if we analogize film to daydreaming rather than to night dreaming. The daydreamer is aware that she is daydreaming just as the filmgoer is aware that she is watching a movie. The narrative of the daydream is more subject to secondary revision than is that of a night dream, resulting in something that is less gappy and discontinuous, and more rational than the night dream. This would, of course, suggest that the daydream, like film, is less effective than the night dream in affording hallucinatory wish-fulfillment.

The film viewing process, though not identical with the process of daydreaming, is closer to the daydream than to the night dream. Yet, the film, the daydream, and the night dream all supposedly resemble each other because each putatively involves diminished wakefulness. Film, then, is said to blend elements of night dream and daydream. But our perception of a film is, in the sense already mentioned, real. This leads Metz to conclude that part of the unique power of film is that it mixes elements of real perception, daydreams and night dreams, accounting for the specific object of joy of cinema, the external manifestation of things usually internal. Thus, Metz offers an answer to the question of why people attend cinema and of what desire cinema satisfies.

The major consideration that Metz offers for the analogy between film and night dream is that both involve lowered wakefulness. Undoubtedly, night dreams involve lowered wakefulness. But I see no reason for believing that film diminishes wakefulness. Metz writes:

> In contrast to the ordinary activities of life, the filmic state as induced by traditional fiction films (and in this respect it is true that these films demobilize their spectators) is marked by a general tendency to lower wakefulness, to take a step in the direction of sleep and dreaming. When one has not had enough sleep, dozing off is usually more a danger during the projection of a film than before or afterwards.[31]

But is this dozing off case really convincing? The problem of lowered wakefulness here cannot be attributed to the film but to the fact that the viewer is already fatigued. If he fell asleep eating his soup or reading a newspaper would we say that soup and newspapers mix elements of night

dream. Of course not. Metz indicates that a fatigued person is more likely to fall asleep during a film than prior to or after the film. He gives no reason for believing this. Moreover, I see no grounds for thinking that given two subjects, equally fatigued, the one watching a movie and the other reading a novel, that the moviegoer will be the one who falls asleep faster.

How does Metz know that films diminish wakefulness? He has not even attempted such simple empirical corroboration as measuring heartbeats, or breathing, or brain activity. Instead he notes that the narrative film does not incite action and adds:

> it encourages narcissistic withdrawal and the indulgence of phantasy, which, when pushed further, enter into the definition of dreaming and sleep; withdrawal of the libido into the ego, temporary suspension of concern for the exterior world as well as the cathexis of objects at least in their real form.[32]

Now I am not sure that film in fact encourages all these things. For if one is attentively focused on what is going on in a film, one has little time for narcissistic withdrawal or fantasy. If you are concerned with whether James Bond will thwart the flooding of Silicon Valley, you are too preoccupied with the action to drift off into narcissistic fantasy or any other kind of fantasy for that matter. Of course, Metz may say that following a James Bond exploit is itself a form of fantasizing. But such a maneuver would seem to me to be a misapplication of the category of fantasy, and a question-begging one at that.

What is even more peculiar in Metz's account here is that, granting him the unlikely premise that films cause narcissistic withdrawal and fantasy, one still wants to know what these have to do with lowered wakefulness. Fantasizing, for example, often involves planning, imagining in detail, for instance, elaborate measures of revenge. Surely, one can sit silently planning without having one's wakefulness lowered. Metz suggests that narcissistic withdrawal and fantasizing are definitive of lowered wakefulness. But that is a strange use of the notion. I can sit envisioning my acceptance of the Academy Award for Best Actor and be in a very excited state physiologically. And lowered wakefulness is, first and foremost, a physiological state. To stipulate that fantasizing constitutes lowered wakefulness would, of course, seem to attempt illegitimately to settle a question of fact with a definition.

Returning to the issue of film, we note that Metz appears to think that the facts—that films do not incite us to action, and that when we attend to the screen, we tend to ignore other portions of the world around us—suggest that the film-viewing state is one of lowered wakefulness. But, of

course, the film does promote a kind of response or action, one appropriate to it, viz., film viewing. Does Metz think that film viewing correlates with lowered wakefulness in any straightforward sense? Are surgeons nodding off when they view medical instruction films? Metz appears to believe that films correlate with lowered wakefulness because when we are at a film, we usually ignore what is happening in our environmental surroundings. But that is called *paying attention,* not lowered wakefulness.

Does Metz believe that his wakefulness is lowered when he, riveted to a semiotics lecture, is unheeding of those who leave the room or shuffle papers? If not, then why should he suppose ordinary film viewers, displaying the same sort of concerted attention, are in a state of lowered wakefulness? Moreover, if Metz is not in a state of lowered wakefulness when he attends a semiotics lecture, would he fall into such a state were he to view a film of the self-same lecture? Not likely. Metz might object to the preceding thought experiments on the grounds that he is speaking of fiction films, not lecture films. But then, let us place the semiotics lecture in the context of a fiction film—the semiotics professor is a part-time secret agent just as Indiana Jones is a part-time adventurer, and a semiotics lecture is part of an establishing scene. Will Metz's wakefulness be lowered as he attends to Indiana Saussure's fascinating syntagmas? Metz's claims about the lowered wakefulness of film viewing sound false and are completely unsubstantiated. To the extent that the assertion that cinematic representation possesses elements of night dream depends on the hypothesis of lowered wakefulness, Metz's thesis is altogether without proof.

Metz claims that film contains elements of daydream. Thus, when we see a film we are gratified by encountering the externalization of something generally internal. Insofar as the film/daydream connection depends on the notion of lowered wakefulness, it must confront the preceding arguments. But Metz, of course, has analogies other than lowered wakefulness to support the film/daydream analogy. Some of these are not very compelling—the filmgoer is aware he is filmgoing and the daydreamer is aware he is daydreaming—but then, of course, the beer drinker is aware she is beer drinking, and so on. Indeed, as the latter comment shows, Metz's analogies between film and daydreaming are all rather weak because they are not straightforward analogies but analogies selected relative to the weaknesses of the night dream/film analogies. For example, film narrative is more like daydream narrative than night dream narrative. But how directly analogous are film narratives and daydream narratives? Enough to make the analogy informative?[33] That is, a systematic problem with Metz's reasoning in "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator" is that most of the analogies he draws

between film and daydream are not really tight; they are just a little tighter than certain film/dream analogies. But that does not amount to much theoretically.

However, even if we accept Metz's analogies between film and daydream, we must still ask whether these analogies will be adequate to support Metz's major claim, that what is gratifying about film is that it presents us with a type of visual experience that we recognize as primarily internal.[34] Daydreaming is a talent that is acquired. Not everyone does it. Children apparently learn to do it through play and through stories. Gradually, they learn to internalize their games with dolls and their stories, often picture stories (which in our culture would include movies and TV). Daydreaming appears to be the internalization of externalized forms of representation such as play and narrative, including narrative movies and TV.[35] What is strange about contemporary film theorists who, extrapolating from Metz, want to explain how we understand cinematic conventions by means of invoking the putatively prototypical structures of daydreaming, is that, in all probability, the narrative devices of daydreaming, in many cases, derive from pervasive cultural forms of narrative such as film. Thus, when we encounter films we are not encountering something that is generally internal, but rather structures of representation found both internally and externally and whose provenance is most likely external.

CONCLUSION

Apart from the questions of detail, which we have pursued at length, one also may doubt the advisability of the overall theoretical strategy endorsed by Metz and Baudry. Both Metz and Baudry propose to tell us about the nature of film by analogizing it to the mind. This places them in a long tradition of film theorists which probably begins with Hugo Munsterberg's *Film: A Psychological Study*. Munsterberg analogized film to various cognitive processes of rational thought whereas Metz and Baudry and others analogize film to irrational processes. The conceptual foundation of these approaches, however, are roughly the same; they differ primarily in the aspects of the mind that they choose for analogy. Nevertheless, even if there is a long tradition of mentalistic analogies in film theory, it is not clear that this tradition has much to recommend it. For we must ask if the analogy approach—whether employing rational or irrational analogs—is very profitable, since, in fact, so little about the mind and its processes is known.

For an analogy to be informative, we should know more about the item that is meant to do the illuminating than we do about the item that is

supposed to be illuminated, e.g., we should know more about dreams than we do about films. This is basic to the logic of analogy. But I am not sure that this condition is met by film/dream analogies. Indeed, I suspect that we probably know more about the workings of film than we do about the workings of the mind. Undoubtedly, this will sound strange to film theorists. But it may be an occupational hazard on their part to believe that cinema is more mysterious than it is. We know quite a lot about how film works, about why it works, about its conventions, and about its techniques. Far less is certain about the mind in either its rational or its irrational aspects. Again, I do not deny that specific films, like *Last Year at Marienbad*, can try to mime the mind's operation in such a way that it is appropriate for a critic to call attention to attempted analogies with thought. But as a theoretical project, I think that film/mind analogies have little to tell us given our present state of knowledge of the mind, both rational and irrational. How much do we learn by being told that films are like such things as daydreams or night dreams when we know so little about dreaming? We do not even know why we sleep. Dreaming is far more mysterious than cinema.

The reason, of course, that films are not mysterious is that we make them. We make them to work a certain way and in the majority of cases they work the way we designed them to work. In general, we understand our own tools and inventions better than that which we have not created.[36] That is not to say that we understand our creations perfectly, but only that we know a great deal about them in virtue of making them to perform those services that they successfully perform. At present, the computer, a product of our invention, is being used by cognitive scientists as a model or analog to the mind. This is a profitable strategy because having designed computers, we know a great deal about them, and we can extrapolate that wealth of information to mental operations. In the past, theater and even film provided useful analogs for the mind though ones not so powerful as those of artificial intelligence. This is not to say that in the long run theories of mind built on analogies to theater, film, or artificial intelligence will be found to be true, but only to say that as research programs they have the right logical structure whereas analyzing film through mind analogs does not.

A second major methodological problem with the approach adopted by Metz and Baudry is that it presupposes that cinema—the cinematic apparatus or cinematic representation—irrespective of specific films is an appropriate subject for psychoanalysis.[37] Arguments to justify the use of psychoanalysis to explicate cinema as such are remarkably absent in Metz and

Baudry. That is, it is never asked whether we should attempt to psychoanalyze cinema as such.

Of course, if one believes that everything is ripe for psychoanalysis, then one would not require an argument for its application to anything of human origin, including the cinematic apparatus. But the pressing methodological question is whether things like the cinematic apparatus or cinematic representation are licit topics for psychoanalysis. Now it seems to me that not everything that is human is grist for the psychoanalytic mill. For example, the explanation of the particular construction of a given bridge in terms of psychoanalysis would be bizarre. We would seek, instead, explanations of the construction of the bridge by reference to traffic, commerce, patterns of exchange, and the state of the art of bridge building. And if we wanted to explain the existence of bridges as such, we would do it by reference to certain general facts about geography, human society, economics, and so on. It would be peculiar to answer questions about bridges by reference to psychosexual symbolism (though bridges may have psychosexual portents in someone's dream).

But if some phenomena bear psychoanalyzing and others do not, what criteria guide us these matters? And are things like the cinematic apparatus and cinematic representation such that our criteria indicate they should be analysands or, rather, should they be in the same category as bridge construction?

To specify the criteria for the appropriateness of psychoanalytic explanations, we must recall that psychoanalytic theory is designed to explain the *ir*rational. The general paresis and epileptic fits, due to injury of Broca's area in the brain, are *non*rational and not a subject for psychoanalytic enquiry. Similarly, when an agent does something that is rational, we have no prima facie reason to investigate into the psychoanalytic causes of his behavior. That is, a methodological constraint on psychoanalytic explanation is that it not be mobilized until there is a recognizable breakdown in rationality (which cannot be explained in terms of the intervention of some nonrational process).

Given this requirement, which is mandated by the very concept of psychoanalysis, it is clear that not all beliefs, not all emotional, social, aesthetic, and cognitive responses are candidates for psychoanalytic investigation. Insofar as psychoanalysis is designed to conceptualize irrational behavior, *which is only identifiable as a deviation from rational behavior*, there is no work for psychoanalysis to do where the behavior is of an unmistakably rational sort. That is, where adequate rationalistic explanations are available, we do not require psychoanalysis.

So to mobilize psychoanalysis, we must show that the phenomena or behavior in question are irrational rather than rational. At the very least, one problem with Metz, Baudry, and their epigones is that they have not bothered to show that such things as the cinematic apparatus or cinematic representation are irrational or that our interactions with them as viewers are irrational. More importantly, it is not clear that anyone could show that these phenomena are irrational. The cinematic apparatus, as Baudry calls it, was created through a process of invention that applied scientific reasoning to the realization of a purpose, the projection of moving images. There was nothing irrational in the technological solutions that resulted in the development of the celluloid film strip or the projector gate. Nor was the move from the early arcade movieolas to screened film prompted by an irrational longing for the mother's breast; it is explained by the degree to which it promised greater profitability.

Perhaps it will be urged that even if the development of the screening apparatus was not an irrational process, but a matter of finding means to an end, the end itself, the purpose which propelled that development, was irrational. That is, the aim of having projected, moving images is irrational. But this is rather implausible. The Lumières, for example, employed projected pictures to disseminate information about the world. What is irrational about that? And given the way humans are built, the communication of information by projected moving images seems eminently sensible. Nor does the ensuing adaptation of cinema for entertainment and artistic purposes seem irrational, unless one believes that entertainment and art are necessarily irrational. Similar objections can be leveled at Metz's unquestioning mobilization of psychoanalysis to investigate cinematic representation. For it is not clear at all that the practice of cinematic representation—the denotation of absent referents by means of moving images—is inherently irrational. Given the way humans have evolved it is a brilliant means of communication. The burden of proof here is with Metz and Baudry. They must show that the cinematic medium is irrational in origin or effect before they start psychoanalyzing it.

Now I do not intend to deny that individual films may be irrationally constructed or that specific films or types of films may elicit irrational responses from spectators. And in such cases psychoanalysis may be an appropriate tool for analysis. But this admission does not serve to warrant the approaches Metz and Baudry advance. For they are not speaking of specific films or groups of films. They propose to analyze the apparatus as such and cinematic representation as such, i.e., regardless of what films or types of films are being shown. And this requires a demonstration that the

structure of and interaction with the apparatus and cinematic representation is inevitably irrational. But neither Metz or Baudry has established this, nor do I think either can. For the cinematic projection apparatus and cinematic representation are calculated technological inventions, not fantasies, which were developed to serve tangibly rational purposes. Indeed, given the role in modern communication that these structures serve and the importance of such communication for human social life today, it seems perverse to think they are necessarily irrational. The notion that representation per se is irrational, given the way humans are built and the way they communicate, is absurd. The practice of representation, like that of bridge building, is a ***normal*** part of human life.

Without question, there is a tendency in psychoanalytic theorizing to regard every aspect and institution of human existence as a field for psychoanalytic speculation. And Metz and Baudry belong to this tendency. But just because there is a tendency to ignore the obvious constraints on psychoanalytic theorizing discussed earlier, that does not legitimatize such speculation. Such theorists should restrict their field of study to the phenomena which can be plausibly demonstrated to pertain to the irrational.[38] And that, I submit, excludes cinematic representation as such and its projection apparatus from the psychoanalytic ballpark. To think otherwise is a bit of psychoanalytic imperialism and we shall see other variations of this imperialism in the ensuing chapters.

2.

MARXISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

THE ALTHUSSERIAN-LACANIAN PARADIGM

THE aspirations of the Althusserian-Lacanian approach in contemporary film theory must be understood against the broad background of Marxist aesthetic theorizing in the West. Roughly speaking, Western Marxist art theory has been preoccupied with two large problems. The first is whether art can perform an emancipatory role in the class struggle, and, if it can, by what means can this role be effected. Some, like Lukács, propose realism as the means for emancipation, while others such as Brecht and Benjamin advocate disjunctive, avant-gardist techniques. Adorno affirms that works of modernist art have a subversive capability; however, he is exceedingly pessimistic about the effects this can bring about in societies dominated by mass culture.

The second problem area theorized by Marxist philosophers of art starts with a question that is not specifically aesthetic, although the answer it receives involves a theory of the role and structure of mass art and mass media in modern, Western societies. The question is why haven't the masses of the industrial West revolted against capitalism or acted in other ways in order to transform their societies in the direction of communism? Why, that is, have Marx's predictions failed? One way this question is answered is by reference to ideology. Capitalism, through its mass popular art industry—the movies, TV, radio, popular music, and so on—confuses, mystifies, and manipulates our minds in such a way as to thwart the development of emancipatory consciousness. Marcuse writes:

> Marxian theory soon recognized that impoverishment does not necessarily provide the soil for revolution, that a highly developed consciousness and

> imagination may generate a vital need for radical change in advanced material conditions. The power of corporate capitalism has stifled the emergence of such a consciousness and its imagination: its mass media have adjusted the rational and emotional faculties to its market and its policies and steered them to a defence of its domination.[1]

Given the view that ideology, as disseminated by capitalist mass culture, is a major force in stultifying emancipatory consciousness, the Marxist aesthetician, or cultural theorist, proceeds by isolating the features of mass art and media through which our minds are manipulated. Adorno, for example, argues that the standardization of art for the purposes of mass distribution contributes to the "standardization" of the art consumer while, at the same time, reinforcing the capitalist myth of individualism. Thus, the consumer behaves in a regimented manner while believing that her behavior is a matter of her own personal choice. Speaking of the composition of popular music, Adorno says:

> He (the composer) must write something impressive enough to be remembered and at the same time well-known enough to be banal. What helps here is the old-fashioned individualistic moment which in the production process is voluntarily or involuntarily spared. It corresponds as much to the need to hide the all-governing standardization of form and feeling from a listener who should always be treated as if the mass product was meant for him alone.[2]

The question of why the Western working class fell short of Marx's predictions has been with Marxists at least since the thirties, as has been the hypothesis that the ideological operation of mass culture adequately answers this question. Of course, different Marxist commentators have offered different theories of the ways in which mass culture works in disseminating ideology. Althusserian Marxism differs from Marcuse's variant in many details; however, they can both be seen as attempts to answer the same question in roughly the same ways, i.e., by invocation of the mind manipulating capacities of ideology in the service of capitalism.

Historically, it is the case that the influence of Althusserian Marxism in film theory has been *primarily* as a tool for analyzing the operation of ideology. Althusserian Marxism also tries to give an answer to the question of the emancipatory capability of art, but, as we shall see, it is unclear whether this account makes sense in the context of the view of ideology that Althusserians propound.

If the problem of the docility of the working class has been with Western Marxists since the thirties, it is also true that it was felt to be particularly pressing in the late sixties and early seventies when contemporary film

theory began to consolidate. The failure of the high hopes of the New Left forced Western Marxists to offer an account of their lack of success in encouraging the working class to join with student protesters and life-style revolutionists in the overthrow of the capitalist establishment. The hypothesis of ideological, mind-manipulation, of course, presented a ready framework with which to explain the failure of the New Left. And the Althusserian version of this approach became the preferred method of ideological analysis for contemporary film theorists.

Americans radicals were probably predisposed to ideological, mind-manipulation hypotheses. Marcuse was a presiding figure for the American New Left and he explicitly endorsed such a hypothesis. As well, the post-World War II generation of Americans which was to comprise contemporary film theory was brought up on the immensely popular exposés of advertising of Vance Packard who, from an non-Marxist perspective, convinced many that capitalism was surreptitiously molding our consciousnesses from every direction.[3] At the same time, mind-manipulation hypotheses are also in a way quite flattering to film theorists. For in identifying ideology, as disseminated by such things as mass movies, as the key to the riddle of the working class, one's analysis of film acquires vast political significance. This, however, may reveal one of the shortcomings of the contemporary theory of ideology, including especially the Althusserian variant. For the case for supporting mind-manipulation theories may invest ideology with more power than it actually has. Or to put the point differently, ideology may not be what stops the working class from resisting capitalism. But these are issues to which I shall return in the conclusion of this chapter when I assess the overall advisability of the Althusserian explanation of ideology.

Contemporary film theory is a product of the sixties. Undoubtedly, it is a beneficiary of the movie craze of that decade. Especially in America, a post-World War II generation, nurtured on old films on TV, came of age, extolling movies as a central cultural icon and encouraging the amateur and professional study of film. Coincident with this boom of interest in cinema, of course, were the major political and cultural upheavals of the sixties and early seventies. Not surprisingly, many of those who participated in the movie boom were also, at the same time, immersed in radical politics. As a result, there was a predictable tendency to attempt to combine prevailing interests in movies and politics. Thus, the desire was spawned to create a Marxist study of film, one aimed at explicating the ways in which film instilled ideology in its spectators, a task rendered more urgent, as already noted, by the belief that ideology represented a central problem to be solved by Marxists.

However, such a project, perforce, required some grasp of the psychol-

ogy of spectators. And, though Marxism had a notion of ideology, it lacked a settled account of the way in which that ideology was implemented psychologically.[4] It was in this context that the writings of Louis Althusser became increasingly important for film researchers. For Althusser suggested an approach that incorporated psychoanalytic theory—notably that of Jacques Lacan—into the characterization of ideology. Film researchers seized upon, while sometimes also modifying, Althusser's framework, and, as well, took Althusser as a precedent whose work legitimatized further appropriations of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the name of Marx. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce an overview of Althusser's approach to ideology, emphasizing the putative linkage with psychoanalysis. Mention will also be made selectively of expansions on this approach by contemporary film theorists. As well, I will examine certain Lacanian characterizations of language and of psychosexual development where those have had significant impact on film studies. The chapter should not be mistaken as a primer on Althusser and Lacan. Themes have been drawn from their work on the basis of their influence on contemporary film theory.

ALTHUSSER AND IDEOLOGY: MARXISM AND THE INVOCATION OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Althusser has made contributions in numerous areas of Marxist philosophy, including the philosophy of science (broadly construed), historiography, and the theory of ideology. In several ways, these various concerns are often interlocking. For example, Althusser's accounts of science and ideology would appear to be mutually interdependent. Yet, most contemporary film theory, in terms of what it uses from Althusser's work, relies primarily upon his writings on ideology, effectively in isolation from his larger epistemological projects. This is not to say that contemporary film theorists necessarily demur from Althusser's other commitments (though some do), but rather that they do not materially and explicitly deploy Althusserian epistemology and historiography in their film analyses. Instead, the ideological analyses are focal, especially those found in "Marxism and Humanism," "Freud and Lacan," and, most importantly, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)."[5] Consequently, I shall concentrate on these essays, along with making some comments on Althusser's essays on art.[6] Also, I shall try to indicate the way in which Althusser's treatment of ideology afforded an opportunity for film theorists to apply Lacanian psychoanalysis to the study of film ideology even though Althusser himself did not develop such an analysis.

Althusser's approach to ideology is essentially functionalist.[7] In order to continue its existence over time, any social formation must not only involve itself in production—i.e., the production of goods and services to meet its current needs; the social formation must also be engaged in a process of reproduction. That is, it must reproduce itself in order to sustain itself. This requires not only the replacement of depreciating machinery and dwindling resources, but also the replacement of the labor force. Moreover, the labor force—indeed the entire population of the social formation—must not only be physically reproduced through the supply of vital necessities; the population must also be reproduced in such a way that the roles, values, and even the metaphysics requisite to the social formation remain relatively stable from generation to generation.

In capitalism, the state is the nodal point for the reproduction of the social formation. It secures the reproduction of the social formation by means of two sorts of mechanisms which Althusser calls "apparatuses": Repressive State Apparatuses, e.g., the army and the police, whose medium primarily is force; and Ideological State Apparatuses, whose medium might be said to be persuasion, or, less informatively, ideology. Ideological State Apparatuses include the family, religion, political parties, the media, the arts, and even trade unions.[8] The legal system has aspects of both the repressive and the ideological systems. Moreover, full reliance upon the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) is rare because the pervasive working of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) guarantee that people will behave in the ways that the underlying structure of the social system demands.

All social formations require ideology. Althusser writes: "Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life."[9] That is, every social formation proffers a range of roles and values to which the population accedes. Moreover, the relation of these roles and values to the real conditions of the social formation is imaginary.[10] That is, the actual function of a given social role is always misrecognized or misperceived by the individual due to the machinations of ideology; the reformist politician, for example, thinks he is benefiting the oppressed whereas he is really whitewashing capitalism.

Though all social formations deploy ideology, the organization of social forces may change over time. Under feudalism, the church and the family were the primary levers of ideology, whereas under contemporary capitalism, the educational system (rather than the church) and the family are dominant. Significantly, Althusser includes under the umbrella of Ideological State Apparatuses such often private enterprises as the media and such

private institutions as the family. Whether he is warranted in these classifications is a matter to which we will have to return.

The ISAs reproduce the roles and values of the capitalist social formation. The educational system and the family reproduce a populace with the values and attitudes that facilitate the acceptance of the roles the capitalist system needs filled in order to sustain itself over time. That is, ideology functions to reproduce capitalist *subjects*. The ambiguity of the notion of a *subject*, here, is crucial. For Althusser, it refers *both* to one's belief in oneself as a unity, an autonomous "I," the center of one's own experience, and as the source of free action; *and* it refers to one who is subservient to some system of domination. That is, Althusser's account plays off of associations of "subject" with autonomy, on the one hand (subject = the self as free agent), and with associations with servitude (e.g., "I am *subject* to your will"), on the other. The capitalist subject, who believes himself to be an autonomous, unified, free agent, is really dominated. He misrecognizes his acts as free acts when they are really implementations of the dictates of the social formation. Althusser writes that through ideology the subject is constituted or constructed by society as

> *a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall freely accept his subjection*, in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of subjection "all by himself." *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection*. That is why they "work all by themselves."[11]

Here we see that Althusser believes that central to the reproduction of capitalism is the reproduction of subjects with mistaken views of themselves. This is not unlike the view of critical theorists, like Adorno and Marcuse, who think that our view of ourselves as making free choices is the ideological grease that lubricates our adoption of behaviors preordained by capitalism. According to Althusser, we are subjects who believe we are autonomous agents, but whose "free" choices have really been engineered by ideology. So, for Althusser, it is a fundamental task of capitalist ideology to promote our misapprehension or misrecognition that we are free, autonomous agents.

But how does ideology achieve this? How does ideology instill a sense in me of a certain type of agency? How does it construct me as a subject, i.e., as a certain kind of subject, viz., as a subject who mistakes his subjection for free action? It is at this point that psychoanalysis enters the picture. For psychoanalysis, especially in the fashionable formulation sponsored by Lacan, is reputedly a discipline that studies subject construction. Thus, at

least putatively, the analytical categories of Lacanian psychoanalysis can be marshaled by Althusser and his followers to describe the different phases and dynamical interrelations that result in the construction of subjects in general as well as subjects possessed of certain misrecognitions concerning the nature of their agency.

What does this have to do with film? Well, recall that media is an ISA. Thus, film is a means of propagating ideology, or a means through which ideology functions, which in the Althusserian dispensation means it is at least a device through which *subjects,* in his special sense, are produced. Moreover, insofar as the construction of subjects is a necessary condition for the adoption of roles, this operation of ideology is thought to be rather foundational. So the film researcher, taken by this approach, identifies her task as the discovery of the ways in which film operates ideologically to construct *subjects*. That is, the cinematic image, narrative construction, film editing, sound, and so forth are to be analyzed in order to show how these elements of cinema have been employed to facilitate subject construction, or, more specifically, the construction of the kinds of subjects with attributes congenial to the continuation of capitalism.

But how does something like film editing participate in the fabrication of "agents" who take, or rather mistake, themselves to be free? Here we must return to the details of Althusser's account of ideology. Althusser sees a prime function of ideology to be the construction of subjects. Society has various means to this end. These include not only government with its laws, courts, and cops, but also the educational system, religion, the arts, and so forth. These latter ISAs are not mere bodies or ideas. They are modes of *address*. They have a discursive component and it is through this discourse that subjects are significantly constructed.

How does this happen? To understand this, we must start with a distinction between the individual—the human organism, a biological, numerically distinct entity—and a subject—a socially constructed identity which is less than the sum of all the properties of the numerically distinct entity. This entity acquires an identity—becomes a subject—by being addressed by an institution or apparatus in a certain way. Consider this heuristic example: I get a letter from the Internal Revenue Service that says: "Dear Mr. Carroll, Please appear at our New York office to explain your deduction of $7,500 for moviegoing on your 1978 taxes." The IRS is implicitly addressing me as a subject of a specific sort, viz., as a taxpayer, as opposed to, say, a dutiful husband. The discourse, in this case the letter, determines what I am within this situation, that is, what my relevant role and response should be. Althusser calls this process interpellation—the letter addresses

me in a certain way; it requires that I react as a certain kind of subject in terms of a specific role or position (hence, the process is also often called positioning).[12] The subject is characterized by the address, frequently implicitly. The subject is said thereby to be constituted by (or in) the discourse, or to be positioned by (or in) the discourse. Moreover, this process of address is held to be an aspect of all ideology since all ideology has a discursive component. It is always addressed to concrete individuals[13] who are then transformed into concrete subjects (subjects with a certain position).

Lest my modest tax example be deceptive, it is instructive to pause to spell out its extremely wide implications. It is being maintained that all ideology has a discursive component, an address; every instance of ideology functions to position a subject, thereby reproducing a necessary condition for the reproduction of capitalism, or for the reproduction of whatever other relevant social formation happens to prevail. Note, too, that here the concept of ideology is much broader than that which is usually encountered. The constitution of a subject—of identity or agency—is something we normally ascribe to the workings of a *culture,* and, ordinarily, we allow that a culture may or may not be ideological in nature.

Althusser's remarks here are generally restricted to examples of address which occur in the context of ISAs. However, some researchers, following Althusser, have extended it to apply to virtually every unit of discourse.[14] That is, virtually all discourse is thought to address—to position and to construct—subjects in a way that is ideologically portentous. Furthermore, under the sway of semiotics, these researchers have a rather expansive view of discourse. Almost every aspect of civilized life—from sentences to clothing—has an address or a discursive component. So, virtually every element in the culture is participating in the construction of subjects in an ideologically significant way. Althusser's own examples of ideological subject positioning are perhaps not so inclusive. He mentions conversational rituals, and the discourse of priests and educators. But film theorists think that the overall model of address can apply as well to television programs, photographs, novels, and films.[15] Indeed, one commonly reads that the subject is constantly constructed in every intelligible act of speech by means of imaginary projections of wholeness and unity.[16] Furthermore, since most contemporary film theorists are persuaded of the semiotic view that all cultural artifacts have a signifying dimension, it is difficult to see how, in principle, one could avoid saying that every cultural artifact participates in subject positioning. I am not sure Althusser would want to say this; but I suspect that many contemporary film theorists would not be disturbed by this point.

We might think of subject positioning by saying that just as a piece of discourse performs some illocutionary act, it also has the perlocutionary effect of positioning its receiver as a subject. When thinking of examples, like my IRS letter or Althusser's of a policeman shouting at someone, it is easy to comprehend the political significance of this perlocutionary effect because we can name the purported subject position by means of a well-defined social role. But when a TV announcer proclaims "It's 2:37 p.m.," one wonders what the accompanying subject position might be. Or, if I'm singing a popular tune in the shower and a passerby overhears me, and understands me, how have I positioned her? That is, where the discourse can be defined as addressing an individual in terms of a well-defined, social role, one can perhaps grasp the Althusserian point, and even, provisionally, concede that it *might* have some ideological or political relevance. But what of cases of discourse that do not appear to stipulate a readily identifiable social role for their prospective receivers? These counter-examples may not be a problem for Althusser since, except for his examples of conversations, most of his illustrations evoke well defined social roles. However, what will those who have extended the notion of subject positioning say here?

To answer this, we must note that followers of Althusser, especially in the humanities, stress that the subject may be positioned not only in terms of a nameable role. But, as well, coherent discourse, intelligible discourse—for example, "It's 2:37 p.m."—supposedly has the force of manipulating the individuals, who understand it, into believing that the apparent unity and coherence of the discourse is a property of themselves as subjects. Discourse addresses the individual as a unified subject, and the individual mistakes the *seeming* intelligibility, unity, and coherence of the discourse and its address as its own unity as an autonomous "I." That is, coherent discourse, as such, has the capacity to instill faith in the subject in the beliefs that she is unified and free. However, Althusserians hold that such beliefs are illusory, i.e., misrecognitions; the individual is neither unified, free, nor autonomous. Moreover, the myths that the individual is a unified, self-determining, autonomous, homogeneous subject/agent is ideological in nature. That is, the perpetuation of capitalism, supposedly, requires the belief in unified subject/agents, and discourse, including filmic discourse, is a vital mechanism in securing this effect.

Lacanian psychoanalysis plays an essential role in this theory by providing an account of the psychic mechanisms that underlie the individual's misrecognition of herself as a unified subject. Althusser himself does not explicitly work out the way in which the psychic mechanisms isolated by Lacan operate in subject construction in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Rather, he invokes Lacan by using the concept of an imagi-

nary relationship in his account of ideological subject production. This opens the door for contemporary film theorists to enter into Lacan's writings in order to work out the details of subject positioning while, at the same time, using Althusser's notion that the production of "autonomous" subjects is the crux of ideology as their political justification for turning to psychoanalysis.

LACAN AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUBJECT

In the concluding remarks of Althusser's "Freud and Lacan," an assessment of the significance of these psychoanalysts for Marxism is suggested. What can be learned from their researches is

> that the human subject is de-centered, constituted by a structure which has no "centre" either, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the "ego," i.e. in the ideological formations in which it "recognizes" itself.
>
> It must be clear that this has opened up one of the ways which may perhaps lead us to a better understanding of this *structure of misrecognition,* which is of particular concern for all investigations of ideology.[17]

Clearly, this passage all but predicts the writing of "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." However that essay, though inaugurating a research program—by making subject construction the key to ideology—does not offer a detailed psychoanalytic account of the dynamics of the psychical operations and mechanisms that underpin subject construction. The essay may allude to them by use of terms like "imaginary," but for a fuller picture of what is supposedly going on in subject construction, one must turn not only to Althusser's writing on Lacan but to Lacan himself.

Like Freud, Lacan believes that the person, the human subject, is constructed over the course of one's psychosexual development. According to Lacan, our prenatal experience is one of plenitude—of a kind of primordial wholeness. Birth ends this, severing us from the mother. This is felt as a loss; human life begins in alienation and separation which is often referred to by the term "lack" in Lacanian jargon. The human subject is said to be constructed on this loss of plenitude or lack during the latter stages of psychosexual development.[18]

Initially, the child feels fragmented not only by its loss of the plenitude of the womb but because of its lack of motor coordination. As well, the child is completely dependent upon the ministrations of others. These postulated feelings of insufficiency and the corresponding wish for wholeness provide a background for the child's first step in the direction of acquiring an identity, that is, of acquiring subjecthood. This first step involves the

development of the faculty called, by Lacanians, "the Imaginary." We have already encountered this theoretical entity in our discussion of Metz and, as well, it also is central to Althusser's account of ideological subject construction.

The Imaginary is thought to arise around the child's sixth month and it continues to develop for roughly the next twelve months.[19] This period of the child's life is called "the mirror stage" by Lacan in honor of the crucial role mirrors, literally and metaphorically, are thought to play in our acquisition of an identity. The Imaginary emerges in our first experience of ourselves as individuated entities. This occurs between six and eighteen months of age when the child's immature body is relatively uncoordinated. However, via the agency of the child's experience of its own image in the mirror, its feelings of fragmentation and dependency give way to a sense of ideal unity and illusory autonomy. That is, the mirror experience triggers the operation of the Imaginary, a faculty which like the imagination, in older theories of mind, has a unifying function (albeit in a different domain of mental activity for Lacan). The fragmented, dependent child, beset by feelings of lost wholeness, recognizes (or misrecognizes) its mirror image in a wave of jubilation. The external reflection of its own image, which shows the body, which it experiences as a fragmentation of functions, as a total form or *Gestalt,* gives the child a sense of wholeness and unity as an entity numerically distinct from other objects and persons. This ideal unity is also invested with a sense of autonomy. Lacan writes:

> This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.
>
> This form would have to be called the Ideal-I, if we wished to incorporate it into our usual register, in the sense that it will also be the source of secondary identifications, under which term I would place the functions of libidinal normalization. But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather which will rejoin the coming-into-being *(le devenir)* of the subject asymptotically.[20]

Two factors are important here: our sense of unity and autonomy as subjects comes from the outside *and* it comes from what *might* be thought of as a representation (the mirror). Moreover, the faculty of the Imaginary, initially acquired during this mirror event, stays with each of us for the rest of our lives, constantly functioning (in tandem with other psychic mecha-

nisms to be discussed below) to support our continuing faith in our unified subjecthood. That is, throughout life, the Imaginary operates as a psychic mechanism that instills illusions of subject unity through representations or, speaking more expansively, as contemporary theorists are wont, through *discourse*. Thus, it is through the operation of the Imaginary that ideological addresses transform us into positioned subjects à la Althusser. Similarly, contemporary film theorists, often inspired by Althusser, regard cinematic representations as the sort of thing that can trigger the Imaginary, thereby contributing to the construction of ideologically positioned subjects.

The supposed "mirror stage" event, in the child's psychosexual development, need not be taken literally. Rather, it is offered as a label that summarizes our constitution as subjects, shaped, as it were from the outside (by parents, society, and the desires they inculcate through discursive interaction with the infant).[21] We distinguish ourselves as selves versus others. But, in fact, we are constituted by others. We have biological needs, such as that for nourishment, but that is transformed into desires for the kind of food our culture serves. Our *desires,* that is, are socially mediated. Through and through, we are molded from the outside, by what theorists call *the other*. Who we are and what we want arrives from the other, despite the fact that we take ourselves to be autonomous. The mirror stage experience, which initiates this sense of wholeness and autonomy, ironically is based upon the other. This sets forth what might be regarded as a continuing contradiction. We believe that we are unified, autonomous subjects defined in opposition to the other, but this is based upon an extrapolation from the intuition of outside unity: the image in the mirror, specific culturally signifying selections of nourishment, etc.—in short, the other. Discourse, representations, continue throughout our existence to have the power to instill this illusory sense of unity and autonomy.

But we are not autonomous. Rather we are products of the other. And we are not unified subjects, but composite organisms with roiling and conflicting drives, instincts, and desires. Yet, through the Imaginary we construct a mythic inner identity, unified and free, which is a metaphysical illusion masking the facts that we are both heterogeneous complexes and the products of the other, and assuaging our sense of lost plenitude.

It is difficult to gauge the evidential support for this account. Lacan spends almost no methodological energy laying it out in the essay in which he postulates the mirror stage. Nor does he explain how he knows with such precision how children feel prenatally, in their first six months, and in their first encounter with the mirror. One is taken aback when one realizes

that so much contemporary theory is based upon so little documentation. Moreover, it is admitted that the mirror event might not even occur—though it is not said at what frequency—and that the story about the encounter with the mirror should be understood metaphorically as a way of indicating the influence of the other during our first eighteen months. But isn't it straining the metaphor of the mirror to apply it to parental commands and caresses? And, anyway, if the mirror experience is construed metaphorically, doesn't that undercut the analogy between the mirror and film upon which people like Metz rely?

Contemporary theorists seem either unaware or untroubled by such considerations. For them the Imaginary exists and the mirror stage occurred. Moreover, the Imaginary continues to operate through later developmental stages, and it functions to transform apparent (misrecognized) external unities into confirmations of the illusion of subject unity. But since it is believed that these external unities themselves are only apparent, the Imaginary is also the mechanism through which illusions of external unity are apprehended (or rather misapprehended) as unities. The apparent coherence of a movie ("apparent," perhaps because it is made up of fragments through editing, or perhaps because it is full of "contradictions"), for example, produces the illusion of subject unity in a spectator, which illusion, in turn, supports the persuasiveness of the illusion that the movie is unified. That is, the two illusions of unity are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

The Imaginary is the mechanism that responds to apparent external unity by producing illusions of subject unity. So, when (apparently) intelligible discourse, a movie say, addresses an individual, the Imaginary swings into action, positioning the spectator as a unified subject. And, for a moment, returning to the political realm, recall that such a discursive effect is said to have ideological significance because, putatively, capitalism requires that individuals believe that they are unified autonomous subjects.

At this stage in the exposition, it is useful to note the extraordinary variety of apparent unities that, according to contemporary theorists, the Imaginary can use to project subject unity. These include, among other things, human bodies and images thereof, parental imperatives and any meaningful sentence as well as coherent films and novels.[22] One wonders how these very different stimuli can function in the same way as inputs in the causal system of subject construction (also called subject production or subject positioning). On the face of it, it would seem to be the vagueness and lack of specificity of the operative concept of *unity* in this account that is allowing its proponent to treat things as dissimilar as bodies and sentences

as if they were functionally equivalent. But the only connection between them seems to be a verbal one.

We call bodies unified in virtue of their continuity within the limits of their contour; coherent utterances are unified in virtue of their meaningfulness. Despite the fact that we may use the same word to describe these things, we are nevertheless discussing different kinds of things. Once we undertake to describe them less amorphously, we must ask how such disparate causes manage to evoke the same effect; how does the Imaginary move from projecting subject unity on the basis of perceiving bodies or images thereof to doing so on the basis of hearing a coherent sentence? In short, we may need a further mechanism to explain the mechanism of the Imaginary, unless the latter has merely been fabricated through the equivocation of the word *unity*.

There is no reason to assume that everything we are willing to call "unified" shares the same causal potential for the Imaginary. Moreover, if we say that the Imaginary is able to use all these different unities to project subject unities because these different things all have the common property of self-identity, then we have traveled in a circle, since it is the Imaginary that is supposed to explain how things are grasped as self-identifiable entities. Thus, it would be somewhat embarrassing to invoke the principle of identity to explain how the Imaginary works. And, of course, since contemporary theorists presume that the external stimuli that engage the Imaginary are not truly homogeneous (in a way that putatively defies the principle of identity) in any case, something like the principle of identity would be of no use whatsoever.

A related problem that besets the use of terms like "unity" and "homogeneity" in contemporary film theory is that it is not clear that these terms are always being used intelligibly. I know the criteria for applying the concept of unity to a landscape painting, a TV news program, a novel, and a piece of point-of-view editing in a film. But there does not seem to be a commonly shared feature between the unity of a news program, point-of-view editing, a landscape painting, and a novel. To use the concept of unity in a meaningful way, we have to use it with reference to specific kinds of cases. However, often in contemporary theory, one has the sense that words like "unity" and "homogeneity" are being used as if there were a decontextualized sense to them—that is, as if the unity of a picture and a sentence or a piece of point-of-view editing and a body were all the same. This is pertinent to the discussion of the Imaginary, since in contemporary theory anything that can be denominated a "unity" is grist for the Imaginary's processing. And, as we shall see, similar questions arise with an opposing set of terms such as "decentered" and "heterogeneous."

In Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," it seems as though the operation of subject construction, which Althusser calls "interpellation," rests on the Imaginary. However, Lacan also identifies another faculty—the Symbolic—as critical for subject construction. As a result, many contemporary film theorists have sought to expand upon Althusser's account by including the operation of the Symbolic in their stories of subject construction. In this, they remain essentially within the Althusserian research program since they are motivated by what they regard as Althusser's central discovery, viz., that ideology is fundamentally a matter of subject construction. Where they seem to part company with "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" is in its apparent reduction of subject positioning to the operation of the Imaginary which might also be stated as denying that subject construction is solely a matter of interpellation.[23]

The Symbolic stage of psychosexual development corresponds roughly to what Freudians call the oedipal stage. For Freudians, this is a particularly crucial step in the construction of the individual because it is at this time that the organism is *culturally* defined in terms of its sexual identity. For example, it is the period in which the male child, putatively fearing castration by the father, leaves the quest for the mother and seeks to emulate the father in a process called introjection. That is, the boy child introjects the father, which means that he attempts to take on the values, rules, and behaviors of the father. He strives to become manly in the way that the father is manly. The child, at this point, is "sexed" as male; he assumes a male identity. But this male identity is not simply a biological matter; it is also, and more importantly, a cultural matter. For the child is assuming the behaviors, roles, values, and beliefs of what it is to be a man in the culture his father was raised in. For Freudians, the introjection process of the oedipal stage is the means by which the culture reproduces itself, assuring, from generation to generation, the cultural reproduction of the kind of, for example, male identity which is required in order for society to function—warriors in one case, perhaps workaholics in another.[24] The values, roles, attitudes, and ideals introjected at this point extend to every aspect of the individuals' social life. And if Freudians are right in what they assert of introjection at the oedipal stage, then this would obviously be the nodal point in the production of subjects.

Lacanians agree with the main points of the Freudian scenario of the oedipal stage, but they have a more elaborate version of it. They would not say that it is a different account, for they believe that Lacan was involved in discovering the real Freud.[25] Be that as it may, for Lacanians, the investiture of the child with its social roles, ideals, and values at the oedipal stage is also the point at which the child is said to enter language. The oedipal

stage is rechristened the Symbolic stage, the psychosexual stage at which the faculty of the Symbolic is acquired, which is marked by the child's passage into language. Lacan writes:

> This is precisely where the Oedipus complex—in so far as we continue to recognize it as covering the whole field of our experience with its signification—may be said, in this connexion, to mark the limits that our discipline assigns to subjectivity; namely, what the subject can know of his unconscious participating in the movement of the complex structures of marriage ties, by verifying the symbolic effects in his individual existence of the tangential movement towards incest that has manifested itself ever since the coming of a universal community.
>
> The primordial Law is therefore that which in regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of a nature abandoned to the law of mating. The prohibition of incest is merely its subjective pivot, revealed by the modern tendency, to reduce to the mother and the sister the objects forbidden to the subject's choice, although full licence outside of this is not yet entirely open.
>
> This law, then, is revealed enough as identical with an order of language. For without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos that bind and weave the yarn of lineage through succeeding generations. And it is indeed the confusion of generations, which in the Bible, as in all traditional laws, is accused as being the abomination of the Word *(verbe)* and the desolation of the sinner.[26]

Here we see the Oedipus complex linked with the anthropological phenomena of the incest taboo, a correlation which Freud himself had made. Moreover, like Freudians, the Lacanians regard the prohibition against incest as crucial to social organization—"covering the whole field of our experience with its signification." The taboo, as well, is linked with language. Why? Because incest is determined by things such as clan, moiety, and family. With whom one can and cannot legitimately mate is a matter of one's position in these networks which is marked by *how one is named*. The law of incest, which Lacan appears to regard as the fundamental social law, is underpinned by a system of names in which the name of the father, so to speak, serves as the anchor. Who one mates with is calculated in terms of the relation of one's name with the name of the father in question. This leads Lacanians to see social laws, "the Law," in their jargon, as a system with the "name of the father," used as a technical term, as its fulcrum. "It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law."[27] (The anchorage provided by the *name of the father*, as a

technical term, can also be referred to as the *phallus,* also used as a technical term, not referring to the literal penis but to the centrality of the patriarch in the Law).

This suggests that social laws, the Law, if you will, is connected with language, or at least with names. But the passage claims more: "This law, then, is revealed clearly enough as identical with the order of language." The child maturing into the jurisdiction of the Law, in turn, is said to enter the order of language, the Symbolic Stage. But why, one still wonders, are the order of the Law and the order of language *identical?*

Lacan seems to have reached this conclusion by the triple superimposition of a theory of language (Saussure's) onto an anthropological theory (Lévi-Strauss's) onto his own variant of psychoanalysis. This superimposition is facilitated by the fact that both Lacan's theory and Lévi-Strauss's find their inspiration in Saussurean linguistics. Lévi-Strauss thought that the laws of thought that underlie the type of phenomena anthropologists study, including incest, have the same structure that the semiotic phenomena that Saussure theorized have, viz., one in which the meaning of the signs in a language is diacritical or differential, i.e., the meaning of the terms is not defined in isolation but in relation to other terms in virtue of their differences.

In entering the Law, the child finds its place in a system of names diacritically structured around the name of the (his) father; it finds its place, that is, in the most crucial pattern of definition in its culture, one from which other cultural distinctions flow and which reflects the diacritical structure of language. The Law is both the anchor of the system of cultural distinctions embodied in language (though Lacanians might not like my phrasing here) and it is a particularly powerful example of the diacritical structure of semiotic signification. Obviously, the child has been a language user before the oedipal stage. But it is at that time that it enters language in the sense of entering what is thought to be the key relation of the system, thereby becoming a fully incorporated participant in the language. By positioning itself in relation to the name of the father, the child reaches a new level of subject construction through becoming a full-fledged language/culture user.

There is a hornet's nest of assumptions here, many of which involve intricate questions in the philosophy of language too detailed to examine at length here.[28] One problem is whether the theory of language Saussure is thought to offer is an adequate theory at all. That is, a constraint on an adequate theory of language is that it be able to explain how language learning and communication are possible. But Lacan appears to interpret

Saussure's diacritical conception of meaning to entail that meaning is disconnected from reference to things and hinges solely upon the interrelations of difference between the signs in the language system. However, this would make it difficult to understand how language ever got off the ground as well as how it is taught to children. Each sign would just send us to another sign regressively. That is, for language to begin and for it to be taught requires some fixed relations between some words and their referents.[29] Thus, the Saussurean theory under Lacan's dispensation fails to explain such basic facts about language as language learning.

One could avoid the aforesaid regress, of course, by maintaining that some words are not defined in terms of other words but are taught ostensively. But Lacan does not. Rather, he takes his putative disconnection of words from the world as yet another mark of humanity's alienated nature. The Symbolic stage of development is marked by division and difference (because it is articulated by the *diacritical* structure of language). Human life is completely mediated by language, language anchored in the Law of the name of the father. Lacan writes:

> Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him "by flesh and blood"; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gift of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death; and so total that through them he *is* not yet and even beyond his death; and so total that through them his end where the Word absolves his being or condemns it.[30]

At the Symbolic stage, the child becomes crucially integrated in what are thought of as the *codes* of human role assignment and communication; its very desires are constituted within the context of the Law.[31] The mechanism of the Symbolic, then, is associated with language, and language processing, which is to say that it operates with respect to *difference*, since the structure of language narrowly and cultural coding widely is diacritical.

The Symbolic does not supersede the Imaginary, the faculty for the projection unity and wholeness, even though the Symbolic is associated with difference, division, and heterogeneity. Indeed, the Imaginary abets the positioning of the Symbolic stage. For the child must perform an *imaginary identification* with its position in the Law/language in relation to the name of the father.[32] For example, in order to assimilate the sentence "I cannot tell a lie," it is thought that some imaginary identification with the

subject of that utterance must be effected. That, in turn, requires the operation of the Symbolic in order to position that "I" within a system of the differences of the Law/language. So, it is said that the Imaginary and the Symbolic, unity and difference, work together in order to culturally position the subject as a unified, autonomous agent in relation to the Law/language. Moreover, this is not an interaction that occurs only at the Symbolic stage. Given the countervailing forces of unity and difference which underlie the subject position, it must be renewed again and again throughout life as unity gives way to difference which calls forth the operation of the Imaginary once again. Contemporary film theorist Colin McCabe writes:

> Language in the realm of the imaginary is understood in terms of some full relation between word and thing: a mysterious unity of sign and referent. In the symbolic, language is understood in terms of lack and absence—the sign finds its definition diacritically through the absent syntagmatic and paradigmatic chains it enters into. As speaking subjects we constantly oscillate between the symbolic and the imaginary—constantly granting ourselves some full meaning to the words we speak, and constantly being surprised to find them determined by relations outside our control.[33]

The subject's position in culture—which in the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm is equivalent to its ideological position—is constituted by the work of the Imaginary and the Symbolic which appear to have to renew the subject position in every act of discourse (where discourse is broadly construed). Furthermore, this process is strongly deterministic.

> . . . the "theatrical machine" imposed by the Law of Culture on every involuntary, conscripted candidate to humanity, a structure containing in itself not only the possibility of, but the necessity for, the concrete variants in which it *exists,* for every individual who reaches its threshold, lives through it.[34]

Moreover, this determinism is rooted in the operation of language (broadly characterized). Contemporary theorist Kaja Silverman holds that the speaking subject is not really in control of her own subjectivity. Why?

> To begin with the subject's discourse is constrained by the rules of language; it can only speak by means of a pre-existing linguistic system. Moreover, "language" must here be understood in the broadest possible sense, as encompassing not only the operations of denotation, but those of connotation. It is spoken not only by the palpable voice of a concrete speaker, writer, or cluster of mechanical apparatuses, but the anonymous voices of cultural codes which invade it in the form of connotation.[35]

From Althusser, the contemporary film theorists derive the idea that the primary operation of ideology is subject construction. From Lacan and other psychosemioticians, and with the endorsement of Althusser, contemporary film theorists get the idea that subject construction occurs through the interaction of the Imaginary and the Symbolic with the language of the other. Subject construction, moreover, is a strongly determinist process. Language, of course, in this context is to be thought of in very expansive terms. Film, for example, can serve as an instance of the language of the other. From these assumptions, a straightforward approach to the analysis of the ideological operation of film can be drawn.

Since the construction of subjects possessed by the faith that they are free and unified is the foundational operation of ideology, contemporary film theorists will take as their central task the explanation of the ways in which film does this. Since Lacanian theory purportedly is best suited for analyzing subject construction, the film theorist will concentrate on the ways in which film engages the psychic mechanisms that stimulate subject production. In part, this involves triggering the psychic mechanism called the Imaginary which again and again rehearses its mirror stage performance by projecting the sense of subject unity on the basis of the apparent unities issuing from the other. The task of film researchers, then, becomes the isolation of the features of films that impart impressions of apparent unity. For these will be ideological levers that trigger the psyche to endorse the illusion of subject unity. Some of these features of film, as ensuing chapters will elaborate, include the perspectival image, narrative structure, synchronized sound, point-of-view editing, and a panoply of other cinematic devices. The film researcher will also have to examine the way in which cinema engages the Symbolic in its process of subject construction, and this will involve, most especially, showing how, despite the intimations of difference and heterogeneity that come with engaging the Symbolic, film, particularly of the sort called movies, contains the impression of heterogeneity in favor of the illusion of wholeness and homogeneity which promotes confidence in the supposed *sine qua non* of ideology: the unified autonomous subject.

Operating within the Althusserian-Lacanian framework, the film researcher has her path clearly marked off. To study ideology is first and foremost to study subject construction. Subject construction is crucially brought off by the projection of apparent unity by the other. So one should isolate the unity projecting features of film and explain the ways in which their apparent unity is counterfeited, including explaining the ways in which the recognition of heterogeneity by the Symbolic is contained. This will account for the way in which subject unity is induced. As this might

suggest, such a program will involve a great deal of abstract psychoanalytic description of the interaction of postulated intrapsychic forces rather than what we ordinarily identify as political criticism. That is, a great deal of time will be lavished upon the formation of abstract subject constructions—subjects necessary to bear social roles (subject supports), rather than on the ways in which films abet specific, ideologically significant beliefs, such as "The unemployed are just lazy." To the worry that the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm may defer us from concrete social criticism in favor of abstract psychoanalysis, the contemporary film theorist is likely to reply that the psychoanalysis of subject construction is a central form of political analysis. But whether such an assertion survives scrutiny is a topic with which much of the rest of this chapter is much concerned.

AN INITIAL QUESTIONING OF THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE ALTHUSSERIAN-LACANIAN PARADIGM

In the chapters that follow, I shall be primarily examining attempts by contemporary film theorists to extend the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm to cinema along with the problems this project raises. However, before exploring in detail the fortunes of the paradigm as applied to film, it is worthwhile to spend some time interrogating some of the basic presuppositions of the paradigm. In a book devoted to film theory, it is impossible to expend the amount of space necessary to show that the foundations of the paradigm are irretrievably ill-conceived. However, in what remains of this chapter, it should be possible to show that many of the central assumptions of the reigning paradigm are questionable enough and their central concepts so poorly defined that the burden of their proof can be shifted to their proponents. In what follows in this section and the next, I will primarily, though not exclusively, introduce problems that erupt in the Althusserian wing of the paradigm, leaving many of the inadequacies of the Lacanian wing to be taken up in subsequent chapters.

Perhaps the most glaring problem with the research program sketched so far is its presiding concept of ideology. It is too broad. By identifying ideology with subject construction, the concept has become roughly coextensive with that of a culture, thereby losing its pejorative force. Ordinarily we do not want our ideas and our thinking corrupted by ideology. For if a belief is ideological, then that implies it is (1) false and (2) that it is a rhetorical tenet that functions to uphold some practice of social domination. For example, "All black men desire to rape white women" expresses such an ideological belief.[36]

Not all beliefs enunciated or presupposed by a culture are ideological in

this way. Moreover, it seems self-defeating for a Marxist to employ such an overblown concept of ideology, since Marxism proposes to found a culture which under this approach will be ideological. Every community will have to have a culture. Althusser seems willing to accept this consequence. However, the negative force of *ideology* will be lost if every conceivable culture must be ideological. There will be no point in extricating ourselves from ideology if we do so only at the price of entering a new ideology, especially where that new ideology engages in the same, putatively suspect, process of subject construction. Whereas when the idea of ideology is connected with practices of demonstrably *avoidable* domination and falsehoods, one clearly feels the negative pressure of the charge of "ideology" and is thereby moved to dissociate oneself from what is ideological. The hortatory force of *ideology* is lost when ideology becomes culture, since the critical sense of the concept requires us to disavow ideology, while it is probably literally impossible (and politically unnecessary) to disavow all culture.

The preceding observations are related to the question of the usefulness of the idea of the ideological construction of subject unity. It is held by contemporary theorists that every bit of discourse enforces a subject position. In the hands of contemporary film theorists, this focuses analysis on what might be thought of as relatively small sets of phenomena—camera movements, cutting patterns, the narrative structures of whole films, and so on. The contemporary film theorist provides moment-by-moment recitations of how, with each device, the projection of coherence results in the construction of subject unities, which is said to involve interminable oscillations. However, the analysis of subject unities at the level of the way each piece of discourse addresses the individual will prove very awkward for examining the kind of ideological subjects that are relevant to social analysis.

Let us make a rough, pragmatic distinction between two kinds of subjects: the *occurrent subjects,* i.e., unified subjects constructed on a moment-to-moment basis by the way in which discourse engages the Imaginary and the Symbolic; and *stable subjects,* i.e., subjects with, among other things, personality profiles that remain *relatively* stable over long periods of time. An obedient worker, a misogynist, a bigot, and a dedicated bureaucrat are examples of what I call stable subjects. But it is hard to see how we are to get from the construction of momentary subject unities to the stable subject/agents of the type just listed. It is an act of faith rather than of science to believe that these momentary constructions amount to particularized, stable, ideologically instilled subject/agents. What are the patterned variables

and regularities that transform momentary subject unities into stable ideological subjects?

The contemporary film theorist describes batteries of subject unities, but it is impossible to see how these combine into ideologically mystified agents with the inclination to uphold practices of social domination. If it is true that discourse produces subject unities, these are extremely formal in nature, almost like Kantian transcendental egos. But it hard to see the way in which, logically, one could derive anything informative to say about the formation of stable ideological agents with fixed dispositions on the basis of such formal unities.

One way to appreciate the force of the preceding charge is to note that though I may be addressed ideologically by some discourse, and though I may take that discourse to be a coherent utterance—for example, "Unions are by their very nature anti-democratic"—I may reject the utterance. Or, to take an example from film, I may resist the heroic portrait of the KKK in *The Birth of a Nation*. These examples show that I am not the simple reflex effect or imprint of every coherent signifier. But how do these resistances happen? And what are the differentia between being positioned as a believer-subject-unity versus a disbeliever-subject-unity. An answer to this might begin by establishing the relation between what I have called occurrent subject constructions and stable ideological subjects. But contemporary film theorists, who use this model, have nothing to offer here. At the very least, this suggests that the construction of subjects through discourse *simpliciter* is not a very useful concept for supplying us with an analysis of the formation of ideological agents. The animus of my objection here is not essentially political. I am not saying the problem is that the concept of subject unity is not helpful for revolutionary praxis (though probably it is not). Rather, I am making the logical point that the notion of the construction of subject unities through discourse falls short of what it ostensibly promises to explain—the creation of ideological agents.

A major assumption of Althusserian-Lacanian film theorists seems to be that the construction of subject unity, in and of itself, is politically negative. On the face of it, this seems an unlikely premise. For if the problem of the construction of subject unity is that it supplies a necessary condition for further ideological operations—for example, the creation of ideological agents—then it must be admitted that the construction of unified subjects also appears to afford a necessary condition for individuals to adopt emancipatory roles. Am I not positioned by "Workers of the world unite!" and wouldn't the subject unity imparted by the coherence of that text become a condition for revolutionary agency? If this is so, then how can subject unity

constitute a special problem apart from the problem of the specific kind of role-agency with which it is, in fact, correlated? That is, the theory's negative attitude toward the construction of subject unities is unmotivated unless a persuasive account is offered of the way revolutionary agents are constituted without presupposing the construction of subject unities. It is of no theoretical value to say that true revolutionaries are or will be constituted differently from those under capitalism: an adequate theory for analyzing ideology in the capitalist epoch must portray the why and wherefore of this.

Indeed, for Marxists, the whole issue of emancipation renders the Althusserian framework problematic.[37] Marxism, or at least much Marxism, operates under the assumption that available within everyday life are opportunities for emancipatory changes in consciousness. But given the Althusserian conception of ideology it is impossible to understand how this could happen. Another way to make this point is to note that the Althusserian account is functionalist; as such it offers a picture of the Ideological State Apparatuses functioning well. But it seems that the account presents the ISAs as functioning too well. The model appears to preclude their malfunctioning, though surely the ISAs do malfunction, and knowledge of that malfunctioning, which the Althusserian system denies its followers, would, of course, be quintessentially useful knowledge for Marxist praxis, not to mention good social science. Upon what basis can an emancipatory praxis occur in the world of the ISAs? Note that trade unions and political parties are listed as Ideological *State* Apparatuses. Earlier I raised the question of whether this classification was apt? Perhaps now the committed radical can see the point of the question. Also, the family, ostensibly a private institution, is an ISA. But is this true of politically aware working-class families, and the families of other oppositional groups?

We opened this chapter by noting that an abiding issue for Marxist aesthetics is the identification of the emancipatory potential of art. But it seems to me that art cannot be granted an emancipatory role that is intelligible within the rest of Althusser's system. Of course, in his writings, Althusser does try to assert that art is emancipatory. He claims, for example, that the Brechtian alienation effect contests the myth of psychological unity. He says that "in the theatrical world, as in the aesthetic world more generally, ideology is always in essence a site of a competition and a struggle in which the sound and fury of humanity's political and social struggles is faintly or sharply echoed."[38] But where, given Althusser's picture of ideology, does the spectator find the wherewithal to recognize, let alone join, this competition? On occasion, Althusser waffles almost incoherently, saying that real art is not to be ranked as an ideological agency, though

neither is it scientific, which, for him, means productive of knowledge of reality.[39] However, no clear explication of this can be located intelligibly within Althusser's essentially dualist epistemology wherein science and ideology are the basic contrasting terms.

Consider this specimen of Althusser's practical art criticism. Speaking of the painter Leonardo Cremonini, Althusser claims:

> If Cremonini's faces are ***deformed,*** it is because they do not have the ***form*** of ***individuality,*** i.e., of ***subjectivity,*** in which "men" immediately recognize that man is the ***subject,*** the centre, the author, the "creator" of his objects and his world. Cremonini's human faces are such that they cannot be ***seen,*** i.e., identified as bearers of the ideological function of the expression of ***subjects***. That is why they are so "badly" represented, hardly outlined, as if instead of being the authors of their gestures, they were merely their ***trace***. They are haunted by an absence, that of the humanist function which is refused them, and of which they refuse; and a positive, determinate absence, that of the ***structure*** of the world which determines them, which makes them the anonymous beings they are, the structural effects of the real relations which govern them. If these faces are "inexpressive," since they have not been individualized in the ideological form of identifiable subjects, it is because they are not an expression of their "souls" but the expression, if you like (but the term is inadequate, it would be better to say the ***the structural effect***) of an absence, visible in them, the absence of the structural relations which govern their world, their gestures and even their experience of freedom.[40]

But if the implications of these paintings are to be found in what is not in them, i.e., their absences, and if that, in turn, signals an entire anti-humanist theory, one must ask who the spectator is who can derive this from the art works? It would have to be, at least, someone in command of the anti-humanist theory, as well as someone who could correlate the aforesaid absences with that theory. And the likeliest candidate here would be an Althusserian scientist. But art like this is hardly emancipatory in the sense Marxist aesthetics has traditionally thought art could be; for it requires a spectator who already knows the truth.[41]

Previously, we noted that within the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm the construction of subject unities is regarded negatively. Now we must return to that issue. Althusser argued that the production of a unified subject through discourse was simultaneously the production of a subject, one to be ruled. Here we have what might be thought of as determinism with respect to discourse; call it discourse determinism, wherein the subject is an effect of the discourse (of the signifier). Such a position is fraught with the difficulties of determinism plus some of its own making.

Those of its own making derive from the primacy of place that it accords

discourse: the postulated causal nexus between subject position followed by subjection is implausible. Hearing does not necessitate believing, let alone complying. One often rejects what one hears even if it is intelligible. That is, even if a piece of discourse is intelligible enough to be said to engender a unified subject position, that by no means indicates that it turns its hearers into willing subjects. Unless we get an explanation of quite ordinary cases like these that fits with the rest of discourse determinism, then we have no reason to believe that we are always subjected, in politically significant respects, by the mere intelligibility of discourse. It may be urged that whenever I reject one subject address it is because I have already been positioned by an earlier, contradictory subject address. But why do I choose one among rival subject addresses? Can an account be given that decisively precludes all free action on the part of the individual?

Furthermore, if it is argued that the individual is unfree because he is initially an empty organism completely shaped by some discourse, then it would seem that the implicit definition of freedom here is too extreme. It amounts to the claim that the only free individual would be sui generis. But the relevant ideal of freedom is based on the belief that agents can do otherwise and not that they ultimately create themselves.

Within the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm, the individual is said to be invested with the belief that she is autonomous, but this is a false belief in the service of ideology. But why does the contemporary theorist deny autonomy to the individual? Earlier we read Silverman offering as a reason that "the subject's discourse is constrained by the rules of language; it can only speak by means of a pre-existing linguistic system." However, the assumption, in this argument, of what freedom would have to be, were there such a thing, is too extravagant. For this argument appears to presuppose that no speaking subject is free unless it creates the language it speaks. But this is absurd. If I have a hammer and I *can* use it to build a house, or a hobby horse, or simply use it to pound the ground, then it seems to me that I am free in what I hammer. And if I hammered someone who annoyed me—while certifiably sane—I would be responsible for my act since it was free. But Silverman's argument, by logical analogy, would have it that I am not free because I did not invent hammers. This idea of freedom, however, is unacceptably exorbitant, and any argument that uses it as a standard of what freedom is is unsound.

As Silverman's argument exemplifies, there is a presumption among Althusserian-Lacanians that if human actions have certain structural conditions, these constrain human action in a way inimicable to autonomy. Languages have both syntactical rules and semantical rules. But it is strange

to think of these as constraints that preclude autonomy. For these very features of language are what enable the speaker to speak—to, for example, denounce capitalism. If the language lacked these structural conditions, nothing could be said, which would in fact be a real blow to the possibility of human autonomy.

Languages like English do not determine what can be said in them in any politically significant way; nor do they challenge the individual's autonomy in virtue of their rules. They, in fact, empower the individual. One way to see this is to imagine what it would be like were there no semantical or syntactical rules. Clearly this would not be a situation in which human autonomy was increased, but one in which the capability of speaking would be impossible, which, in turn, would represent a set back to that which we ordinarily conceive to be human freedom. The problem with Silverman's argument, in other words, is that it presumes as a limitation on human autonomy that which is in fact something that facilitates autonomy. And this can be seen readily by realizing that if we remove what Silverman regards as constraints inimicable to autonomy, humans would lose the capacity to speak, and, correspondingly, a whole realm of freedom.

Similar points may be made with reference to the way in which structural conditions function in society in domains other than language. Society presents the individual with a range of rules, roles, and ideals. Within these conceptual networks, the individual pursues her goals. Without such conceptual networks it would be impossible to formulate goals. Again, the existence of a preexisting structure of roles, rules, and ideals is that which makes autonomous action possible rather than that which blocks freedom.

The roles society affords, though well-specified, are not predetermined. It is not the case, contra the earlier quotation from Althusser, that a social role has antecedently built into it every variation of behavior that will eventuate in the pursuit of that role. The role may be connected to specific rules, ideals, imperatives, and norms, but these must be interpreted by the individual who must determine how and *whether* these factors apply to a given case. This is not to say that role players will not often act routinely. It is rather to say that even within a well-specified role there is ample room for free action.

Another way to make this point is to observe that the bearers of roles have ideas about the very roles and rules they execute; and these can change the roles and rules in a way that is not predetermined by the roles and rules. It would, of course, be absurd to suggest that humans are not shaped by social rules, roles, ideals, imperatives, guidelines, precedents, and so on. However, it seems equally problematic to think that society totally molds

the agent, since social roles, rules, ideals, and so on are transformed by the interpretive activity of agents.[42]

According to contemporary theory, one reason that the individual is possessed of the illusion of autonomy is because he is possessed of the illusion of unity. The underlying reasoning here seems to be that unity is a precondition for autonomy. And this seems plausible when we are considering the Lacanian developmental scenario. For the disunity of the child at that point refers to a lack of motor coordination; and motor coordination would seem to be connected to certain basic forms of autonomy. So, the question arises as to why contemporary theorists think that the adult subject's putative belief that he is in some sense unified is an illusion?

The problem for contemporary theorists seems to be that though I believe I am unified, I am in fact a construction. But is this really a problem? *Unity* and *construction* are not mutually incompatible terms. The Lincoln Tunnel is unified, and it was and is a construction. Thus, the fact that someone believes x is unified does not preclude the belief that x is a construction.

Also, the fact that a subject believes he is a unified subject does not entail that he holds the supposedly false belief that he is not a construction. Furthermore, I may truly believe that I am a unity and yet be unaware of the process by which I was constituted. The belief in subject unity, in other words, does not, on its own, suggest any false or illusory beliefs about whether or not the individual believes himself to be a construction.

Of course, an agent may believe both that he is a unity and that he is not a construction. But it does not seem to be commonly believed, in either modern capitalist or socialist society, that individuals are not constructed. The operation of nurture and environmental conditioning on the individual, the popularity of practices like psychoanalysis and behavioral modification (at least in America) as well as the admission that people change over time are commonplaces rather than secrets in contemporary industrial society. That is, if it is a common belief that people are unities under capitalism, that belief is conjoined with the logically compatible belief that people are, in various respects, constructions.

Since the conjunction of a belief in subject unity and subject construction is not necessarily contradictory, the source of the falsity or illusion in the belief in subject unity must lie elsewhere. The idea of subject construction is putatively the main discovery of contemporary theory. So the belief in subject unity must be the relevant false belief. Contemporary theory, then, must offer some compelling argument to demonstrate the falsity of the individual's confidence in being a unified subject.

The attack on the belief in personal identity is long-standing in philosophy; it has been advanced by Hume and Nietzsche.[43] In the context of the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm, the unity of the subject is denied for two reasons: first, because the person is always the production of the other, and second, because of something to do with the unconscious. Let us turn to the first proposal.

It is believed that there is no unified subject because the person is always the production of the other. That is, the problem seems to be that the boundary between the subject and the other is blurred in such a way that the subject cannot be thought of as a unity. We are constituted from the outside. We are not unified since not all the causes of our decisions are internal to us. Effectively this implies that the subject (person), or anything worth (metaphysically) calling a unified subject would have to be sui generis. But this involves defining the subject out of existence; of course, all we have left is the other. Nevertheless, one wants to know whether we have got hold of a problem with the subject here or a problem with the definition.

Concepts like person, autonomy, and subject play a range of descriptive and explanatory roles in everyday life, and in scientific and moral theories. They are applied to a cluster of phenomena to which they refer. But being sui generis does not appear to be a necessary condition for their application. I may make an autonomous decision to be a lawyer, but this does not require that I have invented the legal institution any more than my decision not to steal requires that I wrote the Ten Commandments. I inherited the possibility of making these decisions from the other, but that does not entail that *I* do not behave freely and autonomously. Nor does this inheritance show that I am not an integrated subject or a person, since to reach this stage, given the conditions of human life, requires such inheritances. The error of contemporary theory seems to lie in proceeding from the correct recognition that the subject cannot be entirely disjunct from the other, to a move in which the subject is totally swallowed by the other. This translates into an impossibly demanding definition of the free, unified subject rather than one that defines free, integrated subjects in virtue of the options presented them; as Engels suggests, freedom emerges within the bounds of necessity.[44]

The second line of argument against the existence of subject unity seems to rely on the existence of the unconscious. At any point in time, the individual is a mass of forces, many of which elude the purview of consciousness. Some aspects of the individual, like the deep generative rules of her grammar, are merely unknown to the individual, while others are

repressed; these latter are the contents of the unconscious. Subject unity, it might be said, is a myth constructed by ignoring many of the properties of the individual, including not only those that are unknown, but more importantly, those that are unconscious. The individual always exceeds the subject unity. The conflicting drives and forces of the unconscious are sublated from our concept of ourselves as subjects. The subject's unity is a construct. The subject's unity is an illusion.

Here the existence of the unconscious is being used to make a metaphysical point. But exactly what point is being made or refuted? Is the fact of the unconscious supposed to refute my belief that I have a personal identity over time; that I am the same person today that I was two weeks ago? This belief does not rest on an assumption that I have all the same properties I had two weeks ago, nor does it assume that I or anyone else should be able to enumerate every one of my properties of either two weeks ago or today. My lack of knowledge about many of my properties does not seem pertinent to my belief that I am the same continuing subject today that I was yesterday. If I suddenly learned to my surprise that one of my properties was "the being who was almost killed by his infuriated third grade teacher on December 1, 1956," I might be amused, but I would not feel that this ignorance on my part challenged my belief that I was a unified subject over time. In terms of the unconscious and its contents, even its conflicting and contradictory contents, a belief in my personal identity over time commits me to believing that I have had the same, continuing, numerically distinct unconscious over time—that I have not had someone else's unconscious, so to speak, during some intervening interlude—but I need not be committed to knowing all of the contents of my unconscious in order to believe that I am the same person over time.

The above argument is meant to show that the fact of the unconscious does not confront the metaphysical question of personal identity where the claim that there is a personal identity over time amounts to the belief that I am a continuing subject, numerically distinct from other human subjects. But perhaps the fact of the unconscious is supposed to address another metaphysical issue, viz., the claim that a person is a self-conscious being. This claim often arises when theorists atttempt to make a distinction between persons and nonpersons. In making this division—in saying what a member of the class of persons is—philosophers often include as a characteristic of persons that they be self-monitoring or self-aware. But if persons have an unconscious dimension, then there are necessarily some things that they do not monitor and of which they are not aware. Therefore, the idea of a self-monitoring person is a mythical construct.

The argument, of course, is too hurried. In defining persons partially in terms of self-consciousness, it is not necessary to claim that they are conscious of everything about themselves. Self-consciousness amounts to the ability to audit a number of one's own responses but not to understand every mechanism and ongoing process—biological and psychic—of one's own organism. The existence of the unconscious, since it does not exclude the possibility of some areas of self-consciousness, does not directly confront the metaphysical claim that there are such things as persons and that this concept is more than a fabrication.

Often one gets the impression that the real target of the denial of subject unity in contemporary film studies is the transcendental ego. It seems to be presumed by film theorists that Lacanian psychoanalysis leaves the Kantian transcendental ego swamped in its wake. But it is difficult to see the relevance of psychoanalysis to the claims made for the unity of apperception by Kantians.[45] Psychoanalysis seems rather to pertain to what Kantians would include in the realm of the empirical ego. This is not to assent to the notion of a transcendental ego, but only to say that psychoanalysis does not drive it away as neatly as a cross does a vampire.

Nor do I understand why ideologically motivated film theorists are so preoccupied with attacking the transcendental ego. Other conceptions of the subject, like Hume's bundle theory and logical behaviorism, have been conjectured in the capitalist era and these seem to be theories that can be as readily absorbed into the culture of capitalism as can the ideas of the subject of Zen Buddhism and Catholicism. Capitalism does not seem to require one ruling conception of the subject for its continuity. The transcendental ego is not an indispensable element of capitalist mythology, nor is it clear that it or any specific theory of comparable generality is a prerequisite for capitalism. Film theorists, therefore, are not assured of finding the key to all capitalist ideology through the attempted isolation of something like *the* capitalist subject. Lacanian metapsychology, as it blends into metaphysics, may just be the wrong starting point for the analysis of ideology in film.[46]

Indeed, I think that it is fair to say that contemporary film theorists, in general, have not been very careful about their methodological commitments. They defend their choice of the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm on the grounds that it situates human action in the realm of meaning rather than mechanical causation, that it sees the individual as the product of society, and that it regards language as a central factor in human life. But that is not enough to justify the specific choice of the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm for there are other methodological frameworks which also satisfy these broad requirements.[47] Rather than assessing the relative merits of

rival methodological frameworks, contemporary film theorists have seized upon their paradigm more in the spirit of religious conversion than of rational enquiry.

THE EXPLANATORY POWER OF IDEOLOGY

This chapter opened with an interpretation of the explanatory role that the concept of ideology plays in Marxist art theory and cultural studies. There we claimed that the operation of ideology is thought to explain why it is that the Western working class has not taken up its predicted role and spearheaded the transition to socialism. That is, speculation has it that it is through ideology, and especially through its dissemination via the mass media, that capitalism has kept the working class quiescent by manipulating its consciousness. The Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm is but one variant of this explanation, which we may call the Ideology Hypothesis. But in concluding this chapter it is useful to ask whether the Ideology Hypothesis, in any of its variations, is plausible, where by "plausible" we mean "Does it even succeed in answering the question it poses?"

The question that animates the Ideology Hypothesis is "Why has the transition to socialism been delayed in the West?" The answer is that ideology has taken control of the minds of the working class. Whether this is a good answer depends on whether it handles the facts better than any competing answer to the same question. That is, we should evaluate the Ideology Hypothesis in the way that we would assess any other hypothesis of a rational or scientific nature. Namely, we would compare it to rival hypotheses and weigh its comparative strength.

In *Capital*, Marx discusses the ways in which capitalism, once in place, maintains its hegemony. He writes:

> The advance of capitalist production develops a working-class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of a relative surplus population keeps the law of supply and demand of labour, and therefore keeps wages, in a rut that corresponds to the wants of capital. ***The dull compulsion of economic relations*** completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist. Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course, still used, but only exceptionally. In the ordinary run of things, the labourer can be left to the "natural laws of production," i.e., to his dependence on capital, a dependence springing from, and guaranteed in perpetuity by, the conditions of production *themselves*.[48]

In the first sentence of this passage, Marx includes the operation of ideology in his account of the maintenance of the capitalist order; education, habit, and tradition make capitalism appear natural. However, Marx goes on to note an even deeper force that keeps the working class in check which he calls "the dull compulsion of economic relations." Put simply, if the worker wishes to feed and support herself and her family, she must submit to the capitalist system and its operation. There is nowhere else to turn for one's livelihood. The capitalist has possession of the means of production, and this possession is backed up by the military and the police even if these forces are only mobilized exceptionally. Force, primarily economic, but with arms standing in the wings, is the way in which the capitalist system breaks down *all resistance*. The compulsion is a *dull* one but it is compulsion none the less—if you want to eat, comply. Ideology may have a subsidiary role in subjugating the masses, but the fundamental mechanism of capitalist control is economic force.

One thing to note about this explanation in terms of economic force, in contrast to the Ideology Hypothesis, is that it characterizes the submission of the working class to capitalism in rationalist terms. The Ideology Hypothesis tends to render the working class's behavior irrational—either ideology is playing on an irrational, unconscious mechanism like the Imaginary or it succeeds by means of repetitive conditioning. However, the Economic Force Hypothesis explains the maintenance of capitalism by means of the rational decisions of workers. Given the necessity of securing one's daily bread, and given the socially available means at one's disposal, it is a matter of rational choice, a simple practical syllogism, that the worker complies with capitalism.

Marx, of course, was writing in the nineteenth century, whereas contemporary film theorists want to know how capitalism sustains itself today. But there is no reason to think that the explanation has changed in its essentials. We submit to capitalism, even though we may be aware of its injustices and perhaps aware that economic arrangements could be otherwise, because we must in order to survive. Of course, capitalism has changed since Marx wrote *Capital;* many capitalist states have instituted welfare reforms which to varying degrees supply us with the means to a livelihood even if we are unemployed. But this change in capitalism makes our compliance even more rational. That is, given the choice between compliance and revolt, surely compliance makes more short-term sense. Revolt is both risky and difficult. There is no guaranteed success, and success would require momentous effort. Compliance with the capitalist economic system, especially where it is supplied with welfare nets, is frankly the line of least resistance,

even for those who realize that the distribution of economic goods could be more equitable than it is.

It may be objected that the explanation just offered is too individualistic, too centered in the rational decision making processes of atomic agents. The real calculation should be made in terms of the prospects for revolt of the workers as a group, united by class consciousness. Several things need to be said here. First, the Economic Force Hypothesis as stated does speak of the calculations of individual workers, but, then, the Ideology Hypothesis also, one supposes, refers to the irrational processes of individuals. If the Imaginary does play a role in ideology, then it must be recalled that ideology is said to *address* individuals. Also, even if one supposes that the working class could coordinate itself, one would still have to take into account the risk and effort that revolt would entail. Compliance might still, at this point in history, be the line of least resistance as determined by a rational calculation of the options of the working class in the industrial West.

Of course, so far we have spoken in terms of revolt. But the proponent of the Ideology Hypothesis may wish to reframe the question in terms of electoral politics. Why is it that the working class has not installed socialism by parliamentary means? Of course, in some cases, there is socialism in the West. But there are countries, like the United States, where, at present, the prospects are slight. Doesn't it, it might be argued, seem likely that the reason for this is the effectiveness of ideology? However, a more compelling answer might be that the absence of viable alternative socialist politics in places like the United States make compliance to capitalism the rational alternative for each worker. Moreover, the effort required to organize a viable socialist party and the risk of failure again make rationally comprehensible the reason most workers will choose to suffer the status quo. What, of course, is needed in places like the United States are people who are so committed to socialism that they are willing to spend the effort and take the risks against formidable odds. But until they succeed in fielding a socialist party that is a viable alternative to existing political parties, the inactivity of the majority of the working class will be sensible and the electoral road to socialism foreclosed. I do not believe socialism is impossible in the United States. But until a feasible socialist political alternative is in place, the submissiveness of the working class is explicable in rational terms.

The Economic Force Hypothesis, then, is a rival explanation to the Ideology Hypothesis. Are there any facts that the one hypothesis can handle better than the other? I think that there are and they can be summed

up in a sentence: the subjects of capitalism are often very aware that the ideology disseminated by modern society is phoney. Surveys show that workers believe that big business has inordinate power in society, that the upper class controls government, and that rich and poor are treated differently before the law; nor are these the only areas where people are frequently aware that the pictures ideology offers are lies.[49] Moreover, that which statistical surveys have made abundantly clear, can easily be confirmed in one's own experience. Conversation with one's (non-academic) acquaintances and family relations will quite often reveal that Uncle Joachim, Cousin Frieda, and Barney the Oldsmobile mechanic know that politicians lie, that the defense budget is padded with bribes, that hard work is no substitute for being the boss's nephew, that landlords are legally advantaged in their relations with tenants, that the tax laws favor big business, and so on. This is not to say that every member of the under classes has a crystal clear view of capitalism. Nor is it to say that one won't meet a worker who buys everything William Buckley and Irving Kristol write. Rather, the claim is that to a surprising degree ordinary people are aware that capitalism is unfair and its ideological self-images shams.

These simple facts count heavily against the Ideology Hypothesis. Clearly, they indicate at the very least that ideology is not working as consummately as proponents of the thesis maintain. It cannot explain the submissiveness of Western workers in terms of those workers' minds being utterly inculcated with ideology, for the fact is that in large measure workers reject the tenets of ideology. Under the Althusserian dispensation, we are told that subjects always "misrecognize" the real conditions of existence; we are never told why subjects must always ***necessarily*** misrecognize; nor does the claim appear to fit the facts.[50]

On the other hand, the Economic Force Hypothesis is in a much better position to accommodate these facts about workers' beliefs. It says that it is perfectly consistent for workers to believe that capitalism's self-images are bunk, while at the same time they, the workers, think that in the interests of survival and comfort submissiveness to capitalism is the rationally advisable course. The Economic Force Hypothesis makes us cynics; the Ideology Hypothesis makes us cyphers. The former, it seems to me, better squares with reality.

As contemporary philosophy of science has shown, rational inquiry involves the consideration of a hypothesis by comparing it to rival explanations in order to determine which is stronger in the face of facts judged to be settled by competant observers. When the Ideology Hypothesis is placed next to the Economic Force Hypothesis—which also attempts to explain

the inaction of the working class—the latter is the more powerful explanation because it can accommodate the facts that the under classes of capitalism do not, to an arresting degree, believe the capitalist ideology.[51] The Ideology Hypothesis just can't be true. If it were, we would expect every Tom, Dick, and Mary to be parroting a combination of Horatio Alger, *Fortune,* and Milton Friedman. But that is not the way it is; how can ideology be holding capitalism in place if so many disbelieve it?

Of course, to deny that the Ideology Hypothesis can explain the inaction of the under classes in capitalism does not deny that there is such a thing as ideology. Nor does it deny that ideology plays a role in modern life. What it rejects is the idea that ideology is as important as Western Marxists have claimed it to be.[52] And we have also contested the notion that it is as overpoweringly effective as upholders of the Ideology Hypothesis presume. Very often, ideology just does not work. Models, like the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm, which make ideology appear an omnipotent force from whose grasp escape is impossible, are off the mark.

The tendency to overrate the power of ideology is particularly rampant in contemporary film studies. The ruling paradigm invests cinema, especially mass entertainment movies, with too much responsibility and too much effectiveness. It has movies performing a major role in positioning capitalist subjects. But that can not be right. Even an Althusserian would want to stress that the educational system is far more responsible for molding subjects than the movies.[53] And a non-Althusserian would go even farther, suggesting that neither the school system nor the movies is as important as the structure of economic relations backed by organized force for getting subjects to accept their subjection.

Not only have contemporary film theorists given movies too much responsibility; they suppose movies and the media to be far more effective than they are. Even Americans know that their advertisements and mass movies are ridiculous; satires like *Saturday Night Live* could not exist otherwise. And viewers of *Dallas* take J.R. neither as a role model nor a reflection of reality but rather as entertaining.[54] Spectators have far more distance from the ideology flickering on their screens than contemporary film theory allows. By overestimating how effective and convincing media-made ideology actually is, theorists, in this respect, take their subjects, and perhaps themselves, more seriously than they ought.

3.

THE CINEMATIC IMAGE

THE consensus among contemporary film theorists is that their central task is the identification of the operation of ideology in film. In this they are concerned not only with the way in which specific films propound ideology or have political effects. More importantly, they are interested in analyzing the way in which the very structures of cinema—such as the cinematographic image, narration, and editing—are ideological. That is, they presume that these structures of representation are inherently ideological. There is, of course, no mistaking the obvious ideological slant of films like *Invasion U.S.A.* and *Top Gun*. However, one might think that there are movies like *The End of St. Petersburg* and *Mother* which, though they employ the same structures of representation as our more recent examples, would not be chastized as ideological by a Marxist. Yet, the contemporary film theorist maintains that any film that deploys the cinematographic image, narration, and editing in what is called the *realist* style will be ideological in nature.

In the next three chapters, we will listen to what contemporary film theorists have to say, respectively, against the cinematographic image, narration, and editing. I will attempt to defend a countervailing hypothesis. Stated briefly, I deny that structures of representation, at the level of abstraction discussed by contemporary film theorists, are essentially ideological. In my view, the ideological operation of films resides, roughly speaking, in their content and its rhetorical inflection rather than in their use, *simpliciter*, of cinematography, narration, and what is called classical editing.

This chapter is specifically concerned with the cinematographic image as it is typically employed in movies, though this will require some anticipatory discussion as well of film narration, since many contemporary theories see an intimate relation between the standard use of the cinematic image and narrative filmmaking. When speaking of the "cinematic image," I will talk about it at the level of the single shot, and about single shot images of the sort that are described by such terms as verisimilitude. I will refer to these images as mimetic images, images that, pre-theoretically, people are disposed to say represent their referents by way of resembling them. Abstract, nonrepresentational and/or nonmimetic images can be found in cinema, such as Eggeling's *Symphonie Diagonale*. But this is not the use of cinematography generally found in films. Most shots in most films and movies are pictorial; we see a shot of a horse and immediately recognize its referent in the moving picture before us. Throughout this chapter, it is this type of example which we shall have in mind when speaking of the cinematographic (or cinematic) image.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section deals the notion, popular among contemporary film theorists, that cinema is illusionistic and, correspondingly, that illusionism is important in the explanation of the ideological effect of film. In the following sections, I will consider the views of contemporary film theorists in regard to the origin of the cinematic image in photography and the use of perspective as a means of organizing space in shots. Contemporary film theorists argue that both the use of photography and perspective in film have ideological repercussions. I shall challenge these claims.

ILLUSIONISM

Contemporary film theorists bear a marked hostility to a trans-art, trans-media phenomenon which they call "illusionism" and which, effectively, can often be taken as a cognate for something referred to as either "classic realism" or just "realism" (which will be characterized in the next chapter). Correlatively, contemporary theorists frequently endorse anti-illusionist art for the ways in which that art undermines the illusions that realism promotes. Brecht's theater is championed, for example, because it is "a reaction against the perspective tradition of the post-Renaissance world; which posited the eye (and the man behind it) as the centre of the world and art as a window (therefore transparent) on that world."[1] That is, the pernicious effect that post-Renaissance, realist art imparts, and which Brecht seeks to dispel, is the illusion of reality.

Though reference to illusionism is more a trope of the seventies than of the eighties, where the notion of transparency often replaces it, the idea of illusionism is still worth discussing not only because it continues to crop up but because its use indicates the degree to which contemporary theory is motivated, often implicitly, by a commitment to modernist aesthetics.

Representation, in the sense of classic realism—which encompasses literature, theater, fine art, and film—is suspect because it is illusionist, a term one might use to describe the deceptions of a magician. The initial source of this criticism of representation, for contemporary theorists, seems to be Brecht and his diatribes against the dramatic tradition of the West. Contemporary theorists were attracted to Brecht for two reasons: Brecht was an important influence on Jean Luc Godard, an exemplary artist for contemporary film theorists, as well as a central reference point for Roland Barthes, perhaps *the* exemplary cultural critic of contemporary theorists.

Though Brecht is hardly consistent in this matter, in his railings against traditional theater, he, on occasion, accuses its representational practices of instilling illusions of reality which, in turn, paralyze the spectator's capacity to make judgments, notably judgments of a politically critical nature. That is, naturalistic theater engenders the illusion that one is in the presence of an actual, i.e., nonfictional, event, which illusion, in consequence, putatively immobilizes our ability to criticize what we see, especially from a political point of view. Speaking of the virtues of his Epic Theater, in contrast to the vices of naturalism, Brecht writes:

> Just as the composer wins back his freedom by no longer having to create atmosphere so that the audience may be helped to lose itself unreservedly in the events on stage so also the stage designer gets considerable freedom as soon as he no longer has to give *the illusion of a room or a locality when he is building his sets*. It is enough for him to give hints, though these must make statements of greater historical or social interest than does the *real* setting.[2]

> Restoring the theater's reality as theater is now a precondition for any possibility of arriving at realistic images of human social life. *Too much heightening of the illusion in the setting*, together with a "magnetic" way of acting that gives the spectator the illusion of being present at a fleeting, accidental "real event," create such an impression of naturalness that one can no longer interpose one's judgments, imagination and reactions, and must simply conform by sharing in the experience and become one of "nature's" objects. The illusion created by the theatre must be a partial one, in order that it may always be recognized as an illusion.[3]

These passages indicate that Brecht, at least at moments, believed that the techniques of visual mimesis in traditional stagecraft create illusions of

reality in spectators. Moreover, like Plato and Kant,[4] Brecht takes a dour view of what he assesses to be the *illusions* promoted by visual verisimilitude. Furthermore, not only are the techniques of visual verisimilitude ranked as illusions in-and-of themselves; they *also* facilitate further illusions or, more aptly, false beliefs. The belief that what is enacted is a "real event," supposedly stuns our critical faculties so that we believe "that's the way things really are," with nothing else left to be said.

This latter effect is also enhanced by the "compelling momentum"[5] of plotting in classical theater which suggests not only that what was enacted was a "real event" but that the way it was presented was the way *it had to happen*, which implies, purportedly, that society, the social world, cannot be changed. This, of course, has consequences of ideological significance where the portrayal in question—say, of the impossibility of revolutionary activity—serves political purposes; for it is tantamount to admitting and to advertising that nothing (politically efficacious) can be done. Lastly, Brecht sees our critical faculties waylaid by the "magnetic acting" of traditional theater which induces the illusion of identification between the spectator and the characters. He writes:

> Even today we willingly are happy to overlook such inaccuracies if we get something out of the spiritual purifications of Sophocles or the sacrificial acts of Racine or the unbridled frenzies of Shakespeare, by trying to grasp the immense or splendid feelings of the principal characters in these stories.[6]

Thus we see that Brecht associates a cluster of illusion effects with the practices of traditional theater. There are the visual illusions of verisimilitude which illusions trigger further acceptance of certain nonvisual illusions, viz., false ideological beliefs. Next there is the illusion of compelling momentum, achieved through plotting, which gives rise to the false belief that things cannot be otherwise. And there is also the distracting illusion of identification, which is thought to emotionally rivet us to the spectacle in a way that renders our critical faculties inert. So, the representational practices of traditional theater cause several illusions—of reality, of inevitability, and of identification—and these illusions each in its manner makes us susceptible to ideological falsehood; one might say they pave the way or are causal conditions for our acceptance of ideology.[7]

Though Brecht's criticisms of representation/illusion are developed with regard to realist theater, the categories of illusion that he mobilizes are broad enough to be extended by contemporary theorists to arts and media other than theater. The illusion of reality, caused by techniques of verisimilitude, is attributed, by some contemporary theorists, not only to

theater, but to fine art, photography, and cinema. Indeed, some theorists, oddly enough, apply this category to non-imagistic media, such as writing.[8] The illusion of inevitability, insofar as it is rooted in plotting, can be sought by contemporary theorists in any narrative media, including literature, TV, and film. And the illusion of identification might be thought to occur in any art where there are characters with whom one could identify. The illusion effects that Brecht deprecated with respect to tradition have been, in short, generalized across the arts by contemporary theorists.

In later chapters, we shall be concerned with the purported illusionism of the narrative. But presently we are concerned with the attribution of illusionism to cinematic images. This involves two logically separable but nevertheless connected issues: the illusionism of the cinematic image and, then, the capacity of such illusionism to neutralize our critical capacities in such a way that we become suckers for ideology.

As noted, contemporary film theorists have been prone to call mimetic pictorial representations "illusions." This is a term which disdains such representations in and of themselves, irrespective of what is being represented. For "illusion" is a label that signals deceptions, as practiced by magicians and, before them, demons. Calling mimetic representations "illusions," that is, already castigates them, for even nowadays, visual illusions *proper* involve the *deception* of the percipient; and where such phenomena are deliberately contrived to such an effect, one might think of them as a species of visual "lies." "Illusion" is a designation with primarily negative connotations, ones that indicate deceit. Since "illusion" is denigrating, we understand that contemporary film theorists are contemptuous of mimetic representations when they call such representations "illusions." However, at the start, we must pause to ask whether it is appropriate to call mimetic representations "illusions."

Consider the realist, mimetic representation of a tree; it might be a stage flat, a snapshot, a painting, a statue, or, for our purposes, a strip of film, a shot. Why would one say that a realist shot of a tree is an "illusion"—indeed, does it even make sense to call such an image an "illusion?" Perhaps we shall be told that the shot of the tree is an illusion because it is nothing more than a substitute or proxy for the tree, at best it is an ersatz tree. But this implies that what we really always want is the tree itself. Yet there would be no point to having an institution of pictorial representation if what we really always wanted is the referent of a representation rather than the representation.

There are many purposes—including cognitive, emotive, and aesthetic ones—that lead us to want representations of things rather than the things

themselves. We are able to derive information about the nature and qualities of things by considering representations of them—e.g., the mechanical drawing of a motor or a portrait of Isadora Duncan by Gordon Craig—to which we are often insensitive when confronted with the real thing. Also, certain of our interests in traditional paintings and, for that matter, realist film images—such as the appreciation of their life*like*ness—would make no sense whatever if it were the real referents rather than their representations that we were savoring. That is, we have reasons for the institution of representation. And those reasons can be used to explain why certain paintings, snapshots, film strips, etc. should be substitutes or proxies—albeit not substitutes of their referents in every respect or role but only in virtue of an institutionally restricted set of respects and roles. That is, for the purposes of contemplation, a picture or shot of x, moving or otherwise, it would seem, plays the role of x by means of presenting a delimited range of recognizable similarities to or cues for x. But if certain realist paintings, or snapshots, or film images *should* serve as proxies for their referents, why disparage that fact about them by calling them "illusions"?

Indeed, I question whether it is logically correct to call realistic representations "illusions." To call them "illusions" suggests that they comport themselves convincingly as something they are not meant to be—trees, motors, and Isadora Duncan. But realist representations are meant to be partial proxies within the institution of representation. That is, in our society, realistic images, including film shots, are cultural currency. They are disseminated and recognized as the kinds of proxies they are. In fact, they *must be so recognized* in order to perform many of their cognitive and aesthetic functions.

Perhaps it will be urged that paintings, sculptures, photographs, stage settings, and film shots are illusions of real things because they are somehow incomplete. They are always less than the things they stand for—they do not have all the properties of the things they stand for (and, in fact, they have some properties that their referents lack). This seems to imply that the only representations that would not be illusions would be perfect replicas, that is, facsimiles that differ from their referents only in such numerically individuating features as spatial location. But if representations had always to be perfect replicas of their referents, we would, again, have strong reason to wonder why we have an institution of representation. For it seems likely that, in most cases, anything we could learn from or appreciate about the perfect replica, we could have gotten straightaway from the original. There seems little point in criticizing a realistic picture as an illusion because it is

not a perfect replica. It is not an illusion because it is incomplete. Rather it is a representation, the very sort of thing that does not typically propose a perfect replica of its referent. Moreover, it is this feature of incompleteness, in part, that enables it to perform its various tasks within the frameworks of the art world, science, etc. Just because, sensibly enough, representations are not, generally, perfect replicas, there is no reason to conflate the idea of realistic representation, as a viable institutional practice, with "illusion."

Of course, the ultimate reason not to equate mimetic representations with "illusion" is that anything properly called an illusion either deceives or is liable to deceive the percipient of the putative illusion. To be a full-fledged illusion, the percipient would have to be fooled into believing that a picture of a tree is a tree, or, at least, a window onto a tree, or the percipient would have to be deceived about some "tree-derived" property of the painting or vice versa—if we think, for example, that a mimetic picture of a tree is fifty-five feet high, or that the tree pictured in a postage stamp is actually an inch high, we are suffering an illusion. And, of course, it is probably this sense of illusion, the deception sense, that contemporary theorists have in mind when they chide the illusionism of mimetic representation. But are mimetic representations—stage flats, photos, paintings, and film shots—convincing illusions in this sense?

Needless to say, it may be possible to stage a situation in such a way that a percipient might be deceived by a mimetic representation of x so that he reports that he sees x. Certain psychological tests where the monocular station point is fixed, where the edges of the array are occluded and the percipient is stationary suggest this effect can be achieved. That is, under very special circumstances a mimetic representation might be presented in such a way as to deceive normal percipients. However, such cases have little bearing on our own normal interactions with mimetic representations. For normal viewers in *standard conditions* are not deceived.

Contemporary film theorists extend the Brechtian characterization of the illusionistic nature of mimetic stagecraft to all forms of mimetic representation, including the cinematic image. But what can "illusion" mean here? Clearly it suggests that these things lead to false beliefs. But this claim must be even further specified because anything probably can be used to lead *someone* into a false belief at *some* time. An illusion, rather, must be something that has a high probability of leading normal spectators into false beliefs. But what false beliefs do snapshots and still lifes, on the one hand, and naturalistic staging and cinematic images, on the other, encourage normal viewers to embrace? One supposes that with snapshots and movie close-ups of apples, spectators—like Pliny's famous birds—believe that

edible apples confront them. And with theater and cinema, the illusion of reality amounts to viewers somehow mistaking the events depicted by these means of representation for actual events, transpiring here and now. But this is just false. No one thinks that downtown Tokyo is in the screening room during *Mothra*—let alone Mothra in person; how could they be? Likewise, theatergoers do not literally believe that Birnam Wood, moving or otherwise, grows in their local theater. Indeed, it would be perplexing if people were deceived by representations. How would we account for the very different cognitive and aesthetic responses, not to mention the behavioral responses, that we make to representations of things versus the things themselves? Who would sit by as buffaloes or the Light Brigade charge at us or while Romeo fatally misjudges Juliet's slumber? Typically, we must know that we are viewing mimetic representations in order to respond properly to them. And typically we have this knowledge and do respond properly. We are not deceived by some illusion of reality which would, in any case, interfere with the proper functioning of mimetic representation.

The mistaking of plays and films for actual "real-life" events by benighted yokels is a standard, universally appreciated and age-old gag of both theater and film just because one would have to be so dim-witted to make such an error. Such yokels, contra contemporary film theory, are not paradigmatic spectators. Plays and films, when seen in standard viewing situations, do not look enough like the events and locales outside of the theater to be mistaken for them. Things like the monocular station point, scale variation, and black-and-white cinematography work against film being taken for reality, while the missing fourth walls should persuade uninformed theatergoers that something is awry. But, of course, the telling point is that film viewers and theater viewers are informed; theatergoing and filmgoing are institutionalized activities; and the normal spectator in the normal viewing circumstance is there to see representations and not the real thing. The apocryphal yokels are funny because of their extraordinary ignorance. They are not normal viewers. They are such stereotypical comic butts just because everyone else, the normal viewers, can feel superior to them.

There is, *perhaps,* a sense in which "x is an illusion of y" simply means "x looks like y" (if we opt for resemblance theories of pictorial representation). A stage flat is an illusion of a house if it looks like a house in certain relevant respects. This does not mean that anyone is fooled by the stage flat into believing there is a house on stage. Nor does this mean that the stage flat looks exactly like a house. Indeed, it might not look like a house at all in the sense that it could be taken for a house, and yet it might look like a house

across a limited number of dimensions—it has a door and windows while also being obviously a piece of canvas. In this sense a spectator who calls the stage flat an illusion might only mean that she thinks that it looks like a house because it has certain representationally relevant similarities to a house; but saying this does not commit her to believing that the stage flat is a house.

Let us call this latter use of "illusion," the epistemically benign sense of illusion. The Brechtian sense of illusion, as it appears to be advanced by contemporary film theorists, however, regards mimetic stage flats and film images in a way that suggests that normal spectators are deceived or ensnared by verisimilitude. Their argument seems to proceed by initially describing its objects by means of the benign sense of "illusion" and then fallaciously switching to the deception sense of "illusion" mid-proof. In respect to its capacity for equivocation, perhaps the benign sense of illusion is not so benignant, and, if there is such a sense, maybe it would be best to drop it altogether.

Plays and films are often spoken of as if they were optical illusions—presenting misleading appearances, like straight sticks in streams. This talk may prompt theorists to regard plays and films as deceptions. But such theorists are victims of their own metaphors. For optical illusions only become full-blown illusions when they provoke the formation of false beliefs in the face of obvious counter-evidence or information. And as psychologists never tire of pointing out, human organisms do not simply rely on what is imprinted on their retinas for their beliefs but also depend on other evidence and information that surround the moment of perception.

I do not parlay the image in my bathroom mirror into a belief that my doppelganger is hungover before me not only because I know about mirrors (though that is very crucial) but also because the doppelganger hypothesis is refuted by my other senses—just as my hand corrects my eye when dealing with straight sticks in water. The likelihood that a normal perceiver could be deceived by a film image drops precipitously as soon as he can perform physical operations in relation to the screen; I can change my position enough (even in my theater seat) to realize that the visual array is not three-dimensional, *if* I am ever in doubt about the film's oddly glowing "realities." For example, I can move my head and note that such shifts do not result in gaining new information about the edges of objects—that is, the visible edge of the object stays the same irrespective of my spatial relation to the visual array; thus, the array cannot be three-dimensional. And with theater and film, even if there were not ordinarily, in fact, other

perceptible cues, my knowledge that these visual arrays are presented within the institutions of theater and film would be enough to block the occurrence of (epistemic) illusion, just as I would reject these arrays as "real life" because they do not fit coherently with the rest of my knowledge of the way the world is physically, architecturally, and socially (do couples usually squabble in kitchens with views fronting on fifteen-hundred seat auditoriums?). And, of course, though plays and films may employ optical illusions as constituent elements, entire plays and films are not optical illusions. They are marked and disseminated as what they are—plays and films—and they trick no one except theoreticians.

Furthermore, there are certain facts about the normal viewing of mimetic representations that lead to logical conundrums for the theorist, artist, or critic who propounds an illusion or deception theory of representation. For example, representational pictures—films, photos, and paintings—support irregularities like scratches, grain, uneven applications of paint, thick impastos and varnish, markers for reel changes, etc., which the spectator must "see through" in order to comprehend the represented scene. Likewise, the playgoer must "see past" the linoleum stage floor to apprehend Arden forest. But "seeing through" and "seeing past" such surface distortions and perceptual noise presupposes that the percipient knows she is looking at a painting, a photo, a play, or a film, and that she knows the proper way of attending to the objects so identified. However, the illusion or deception theory contends that the viewer believes that the representation is its referent. But if the normal practice of "seeing through" surface distortions entails that the viewer knows it is, say, a film, then it follows that the normal viewer believes she is viewing a film, and not its referent. That is, combining the deception theory with certain commonplace facts about painting and other forms of visual representation along with the notion that knowledge entails belief, we derive a contradiction, viz., that the viewer both believes and does not believe that she is viewing a film.

Many other factors about the normal practice of mimetic representation count against the illusion of reality theory. For example, the use of framing, as a convention, emphasizes the discontinuity of the subject of the representation and the adjacent physical environment, thereby forestalling the already unlikely possibility that the knowing viewer will be traduced. And, of course, to appreciate many of the aesthetic features of mimetic representations—such as *pictorial* depth—one must know that one is looking at a certain form of representation. But, again, if a percipient knows she is looking at a mimetic representation then she believes it is a representation at the same time the illusion-of-reality theory says she believes that it is not a representation, but a reality.

The illusion of reality plus the mundane facts of interacting with representations result in an embarrassing inconsistency. The spectator is said to both believe and not believe that the representation is a representation. At this point, we must consider whether one should abandon one wing of this contradiction, or accept that the spectator is in a contradictory state and postulate some psychic mechanism, like Metzian disavowal, to explain how the spectator tolerates this contradictory state. Most contemporary film theorists appear to prefer the latter tack. But I, instead, advocate that we simply abandon the illusion of reality thesis, i.e., that we deny that the spectator takes the representation for reality, thereby believing it is something it is not. Undoubtedly some such process as Metzian disavowal would have to be operative if viewers did simultaneously believe and not believe that mimetic representations were their referents. But if we say that viewers believe their representations to be representations and if we reject the illusion theory, then we have no need to conjecture a mechanism of disavowal. Not only, I submit, is my recommendation more economical but it squares with the facts better than the alternative approach.

The reasons for rejecting the notion that viewers mistake mimetic representations for reality are of two types. First, what I have referred to as the ordinary facts of attending to representations militate against the claim that viewers misapprehend the nature of the visual arrays before them. And second, the accounts of the peculiar state that spectators, supposedly victimized by illusions of reality, are said to be in are uniformly unconvincing.

For example, spectators are said to "suspend disbelief."[9] This suggests that when confronted by a mimetic representation, I do something to myself or something happens to me over and above my recognizing that which the representation is a representation of. Phenomenologically, I have no sense of such an internal process. Nor am I inclined to believe that it is within my power to convince myself that the painting or film before me is not a representation but its referent. That is, contra Descartes,[10] my beliefs and disbeliefs are not things that I will. I cannot will to believe that "2+2=4" nor that my chair has just dematerialized. Believing and disbelieving are not things that I do to myself. My beliefs and disbeliefs, so to speak, just happen as I consider matters. Of course, one might say that I can *pretend* that my chair has dematerialized. But to pretend that would require that I know the chair has not dematerialized. That is, the concept of *pretending* is of no use to theorists who wish to claim that spectators of mimetic representations are deceived by illusions of reality.

Of course, it might be said that the willing suspension of disbelief is not something that I do but rather something that happens to me. But I must protest that I, at least, have no recollection of ever having taken, for

example, a portrait or a close-up for a person. Indeed, I have always supposed that what "suspending disbelief" comes to is my decision not to criticize the improbability of the events in certain stories—e.g., Tarzan teaching himself to read in the novel of the same name. That is, "suspending disbelief" really means bracketing criticism of narrative improbabilities (rather than, say, immoralities) in certain appropriate circumstances. Refraining from criticizing or being bothered by implausibility is something that is within my power, but it does not affect my beliefs. In fact, if this is the correct interpretation of the "suspension of disbelief" then, in order to do it, I must be ***continually aware*** that I am in a certain appropriate context—such as viewing a ***fiction film*** about life on Mars.

One might, following a suggestion of Gombrich's,[11] attempt to characterize my mental state before visual representations, such as pictures, on the model of "seeing-as," which Wittgenstein applied to ambiguous figures such as the duck-rabbit. How would this work? Well, it might be claimed that we see the traditional realist picture as flat (as a canvas) and then it appears to have depth (as a scene in nature)—first it is a picture plane, and then it is seen as a three-dimensional expanse. But the experience of ambiguous figures does not appear to be a proper analog to my experience of viewing traditional pictures or films. I do not flip-flop between seeing pictures as flat, then seeing their referents as three dimensional in the way in which I shift from first seeing a duck and then a rabbit. There are not complete transformations of my visual field. With ambiguous figures I must see the figure first one way and then in another, mutually exclusive, way. But when I see a picture I both recognize it is a picture while recognizing what it is a picture of. These two recognitions are simultaneous and not sequential in the manner of ambiguous figures. Nor are there heuristic promptings or pointings, as there are with ambiguous images, which will induce a comparable flip-flop between two ways of seeing mimetically representational pictures.

One contemporary film theorist, Dudley Andrew, has attempted to employ the "seeing-as" account of mimetic representation in terms of an oscillation—not between two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality—but between belief and doubt. Andrew writes:

> Quite simply the oscillation at the heart of all instances of "seeing-as" becomes in the cinema a vacillation between belief and doubt. That is, as participating in the familiar world of our ordinary experience yet then slipping into its own quite different screen world. Only an unusually strong act of attention enables us to focus on the light, shadow and color without perceiving these as the objects they image. And, on the other side, only an

> equally strong hallucinatory mode of attention can maintain from beginning to end the interchangeability of what we perceive and the ordinary world, negating all difference of image and referent. Cinema would seem to exist between these two extremes as an interplay between "the real and the image." The film experience in general and in every instance of viewing a film can be analyzed in terms of a ratio between realistic perceptual cues and cues which mark an effort and type of abstraction.[12]

The first thing to note about this analysis is that its expansion of Gombrich's use of "seeing-as" is somewhat strained, if not frankly illicit. Gombrich suggested a scenario with respect to oscillating *visual* experiences. Andrew has turned it into an oscillation between epistemic states—belief and doubt. Why is this a problem? Obviously, the visual oscillation Gombrich invokes could occur—as it does in the case of the duck-rabbit figure—with no epistemic repercussions for the percipient. To find the interplay of belief and disbelief at the heart of "seeing-as" is nothing but a *non sequitur,* as is Andrew's later equation of Gombrich's oscillation with an oscillation between alternately taking the cinematic image to be real and then unreal. I have already questioned the reliability of a seeing-as theory in the preceding paragraphs. But even if that theory were viable, Andrew's derivative theory would be no better off, since despite Andrew's assertions, the play of belief and doubt does not follow from seeing-as in the case of ambiguous figures.

Viewed independently of the purported connection with "seeing-as," Andrew's claims of an oscillation between belief and doubt appear altogether unsubstantiated. Who recalls suffering this vacillation while viewing a film. First I believe Dorothy and the Tin Man are in front of me; then I doubt it; then the oscillation starts up again. One would have little opportunity to attend to the story if one were on such a merry-go-round. Perhaps this oscillation goes on unconsciously. But that is a pretty elaborate piece of psychic machinery to postulate; what behavioral or even introspective evidence motivates positing such a psychic process?

So far I have questioned the intelligibility of the states attributed to spectators by deception theories of mimetic representation. But what of the producers of such artifacts? Is it plausible to attribute to them the desire to fool audiences into the belief that the spectacle before them is a "real event," an event transpiring in the spectator's nonfictionally existing "here and now?" Imagine the chagrin of the makers of *Red Dawn* had the opening of the film not been reported in the arts section of the *New York Times* but on the front page as a news item under a banner headline reading—"World War III Breaks Out on Broadway." Furthermore, if movie makers ever

succeeded in convincing audiences that they were witnesses to "real events," such filmmakers would probably alienate our affections. Who wants to be bombarded by the Empire's laser cannons? In short, the idea that the practice of mimetic representation can be explicated by reference to an epistemically pejorative concept of illusion is thoroughly confused. Defenders of the position may claim that there is some special formulation of the illusion effect that I am insensitive to. If so, then it is up to them to produce it.

Undoubtedly, it will be argued that my account of attempts to theorize the illusion effect is too harsh. For, it may be urged, that whatever failings such theories have had so far, said theories are attempting to explain certain observable phenomena that call for explaining. That is, illusion theorists are struck by the way in which we are riveted to mimetic representations. And they attempt to explain this by saying that we must be responding so intensely because we believe that the events represented are "real events." Why would audiences scream and cry, why would they sweat and cheer, unless they believed that the events before them were really occurring?

But I do not think that it is useful to postulate illusion effects to explain our intense reactions to mimetic representations. For example, we may be just as engaged in and riveted to live basketball games where there is no question of representation or illusion. We can explain this simply in virtue of *our interest is what is going on,* even if this occurs in a "ludic" ontological space rather than "reality." The reasons accounting for our high level of interest can be further specified sociologically and with reference to our personal psychology. I see no reason to treat the intensity of our engagement with mimetic representations as different in kind than our responses to the live sporting events we attend. Our interest explains the degree of intensity of our response, not our beliefs about ontological status.

Also, we generally behave very differently toward the objects and events we encounter in our ordinary, non-illusory daily life. When we take the events to be "real," speeding cars do not thrill us, butcher knives do not appear ominous, nor bickering couples melodramatic. If mimetic representations were taken to be illusions of reality, we would respond to them as we ordinarily respond to the events we witness and the objects we observe in "reality"—that is, generally, with circumspection, reserve, and often obliviousness, nonchalance, or an utter lack of interest. Thus, proposing that mimetic representations cause illusions of reality will not explain why we are riveted to such spectacles, since reality, so to speak, is so rarely riveting.

Instead of using the concept of illusion to explicate our relationship to

the visual arrays of mimetic representation, I would prefer to speak of recognizability. A film image, a photo, or a portrait represents x and, when it is successful, the spectator recognizes x in the representation, i.e., recognizes that the representation is a representation of x. The factors involved in securing this recognition are in the domain of perceptual psychology and we shall discuss pictorial recognition at greater length later in the chapter. What I wish to stress here is that recognition rather than illusion supplies us with a perfectly adequate framework for characterizing the spectator's apprehension of mimetic representations.

It might be countered that recognition is not as viable a concept as illusion for discussing our responses to mimetic representations, for recognition does not explain the intensity of our responses to such images whereas illusion does. I have already challenged the notion that illusion is helpful here. Furthermore, I think that by using recognition as our key concept, we can accommodate the intense responses we have in regard to mimetic representation. For if we discard the notion of illusion, we can characterize our intense emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual responses to mimetic representations, like films, by saying that we know, via recognition, that a given film represents x (or represents x as a so-and-so) something that we find gripping, involving, exciting, boring, funny, anachronistic, apt, insightful, eerie, engrossing, and so on.

If I feel uplifted watching a spectacle like *Gandhi,* this need not be explained by claiming that I believe I am in India rubbing elbows with the Mahatma. Rather I am uplifted because I recognize that *Gandhi* depicts the kind of courageous life that I find admirable and exciting. Explaining the intensity of my response in further detail would hinge on explaining why, if I find such lives exciting, I do. Admittedly, recognizing what an array depicts, does not, in and of itself, explain why I am moved by it. But a recognition account, supplemented with sociological and psychological, and *perhaps* even sociobiological, expositions of why the kinds of events depicted are found moving, will explain the intensity of response.

Thus far, we have concentrated our objections on the notion that mimetic representations, in and of themselves, promote illusion effects, notably the illusion of reality. But it will be recalled that contemporary film theorists, inspired by Brecht, not only claim that mimetic representations are illusory but that they are also conducive to the formation of further illusions, viz., reactionary beliefs. That is, mimetic representations abet the audience's acceptance of the ideological falsehoods that are stated in the plot or implied by the plot structure of a movie. Mimetic representations accomplish this by putting spectators in a sort of trance which paralyzes

their critical faculties in respect to social falsehoods. Believing that what is before us is reality, we putatively accept the ideological conception of what we see as a matter of fact. Mimetic representation is rather like the immobilizing sting of the spider. It stuns our powers of criticism—with illusions of reality—consequently inducing us to endorse propaganda. We see black people represented as shiftless and we accept this as a fact about black people in general. In terms of artistic production, Brecht advocated reflexivity—i.e., calling attention, within the representation, to the fact that the representation is a representation—as a means of short-circuiting this process. For if the actor in a play announces he is an actor, the illusion of reality is purportedly dispelled and, putatively, our critical faculties are again thrown in gear.

The postulated connection between mimetic representations and the demobilizing of the spectator's powers of criticism is a causal hypothesis. As armchair psychology, it is reasonable. But when weighed against the facts, it appears insupportable. Think of all the critical faculties that were not paralyzed by an exercise in visual verisimilitude like *Fort Appache: The Bronx*. Moreover, one must ask of those viewers who thought that the film was truthful about communal life in the South Bronx whether it was the mimetic cinematography that got to them rather than the fact that *they already believed* certain myths about the unrelenting violence of black social life. And wouldn't such racist viewers continue to believe such myths if the film were shown out of focus or if the production had been a stick figure cartoon.

The Birth of a Nation presents a similar case. Despite its pictorial verisimilitude, blacks saw it as the vilification it was, while the whites who embraced it were already racist. Likewise, that *Red Dawn* is a mimetic representation in no way prevents me from seeing it as a piece of jingoistic warmongering, nor does it persuade me that a Soviet invasion is imminent. Nor does *Rambo: First Blood Part II* convince people that the Soviets and Vietnamese are presently electrocuting POWs on wire mattresses. It may in fact reinforce this belief in those viewers who already accept the idea that American POWs are currently being tortured in Southeast Asia. But note, it is not the mimetic representation, in this case, that dampens the viewer's critical faculties; rather the viewer's critical faculties were in abeyance long before the film.

Furthermore, the lack of verisimilitude does not correlate with the operation of the viewer's critical faculties. Jordon Belson's mystical abstractions may evoke a sense of cosmic inevitability but without resorting to mimetic representation. Nor does the practice of reflexivity—revealing, for exam-

ple, that the film is a film—guarantee that the production will be viewed critically. Both *Roma* and *Clowns* are about their own process of production and about their author, but Fellini's reflexivity only subserves the propagation of his world view, a kind of life-affirmative pluralism. Indeed, one suspects that Fellini's intrusiveness in these films in fact enables him to get away with his shameless exploitation of shopworn, universalist (clown as man; city as life) imagery. In short, reflexivity does not result in heightened critical awareness, nor does mimetic representation cause lowered critical awareness.

One might attempt to support the view that visual "illusionism" impedes criticism by arguing that such illusionism works by masking "real" unseeable forces by means of a phenomenal presence that implies that what we see is "all there is." Such a move appears to underpin a good deal of contemporary film theory's rejection of empiricism and phenomenology. This might be called the "camouflage" notion of illusion; the phenomenal detail in the image obscures insight into the actual laws of society. But it is not clear to me that the camouflage theory fits well with other things contemporary theorists wish to say. For in many examples of the illusion effect, picturing a relation—say of a heterosexual couple—is said to frame the pertinent relation as natural and universal. That is, the problem here is not just that real social generalizations are obscured, but that alternative, putatively false, social generalizations are promoted. But if false *generalizations*—e.g., heterosexuality is universal—are said to issue from the image, then it is not the case that mimetic images restrict us to brute, visual phenomena.

Of course, it is difficult to discuss the putative engendering of the illusions the Brechtians have in mind solely with reference to mimetic representation and without reference to narration. So, though narration is properly the topic of the next chapter, we will conclude this section with some anticipatory comments on it in order to round out the discussion of ciné-Brechtianism.

Contemporary film theorists see the illusionism of mimetic representation working in tandem with the illusionism of narrative in the production of ideologically false beliefs. The suspect feature of narrative structure for contemporary theorists is its compelling momentum. The narrative, with its propulsive force and closure, makes us feel that what has been depicted had to happen as it did in the story. Narrative has an aura of inevitability. And this has ideological repercussions because it suggests that society cannot be changed. Moreover, this effect is attributed to all realist representations that employ traditional narrative devices.

But surely this is open to easy counter-examples. Gorky's *Mother* and Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* imply that human relations—and society—ought to be otherwise, while *Typee* attempts to show that things could be otherwise. These works are classical, realist narratives no less than a reactionary item such as *Lord of the Flies*. And turning to films, works such as *Rules of the Game, Kammeradschaft,* and *La Terra Trema,* though all classically narrated, suggest that society should be otherwise. In brief, it is within the resources of narrative, realist representation to convey the possibility of social change. Reactionary fatalism is not an invariant effect of traditional, narrative representation. Indeed, recall that the theater that upset Brecht, whom contemporary film theorists follow, was often referred to as Aristotlian. And the tragedies that Aristotle used as his data were, thematically speaking, fatalistic. But there is no reason to think that independent of the details and themes of particular stories, that stories as such are fatalistic, ideologically or otherwise.

In fact, identifying the closure and structure of expectations of realist narration with a sense of ideologically pernicious inevitability is unsound. The reasoning seems to be: realist narratives suggest inevitability; a sense of inevitability promotes the illusion that society can not be changed; realist narratives discourage social change.

The first step in this argument is a questionable generalization, if "inevitability" means that things could not be otherwise. *Back to the Future* suggests that everything is open to change, while at the conclusion of *The Purple Rose of Cairo,* one can hardly help thinking how different things could have been if the heroine had chosen her celluloid lover. Moreover, it seems that in the assertion that inevitability causes the illusion that society cannot be changed, the meaning of "inevitability" has shifted. At first we take "inevitability" to refer to the sense of closure and structure of expectations in a narrative; but, then, this reference is expanded to encompass the causal structure of society. This is nothing but equivocation. My feeling of the narrative aptness of the disappearance of the ghost and the marriage at the end of *Kiss Me Goodbye* has nothing whatever to do with my beliefs about the prospects for social change.[13]

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE CINEMATIC IMAGE

Though film images need not aspire to verisimilitude, the cinematic image characteristically is a mimetic representation, that is, a representation that people are prone to think represents its referent by way of resembling it. The purported illusionism of the cinematic image, which so vexes contemporary theorists, is a function of the photographic nature of film.

Again, photography need not be employed mimetically, though in cinema it standardly is. And, of course, mimetic reproduction was the purpose for which photography, and then cinematography, were developed. So there is, at the very least, a strong historic bond between cinematography and verisimilitude which, for contemporary film theorists, also involves a bond with illusionism. Thus, the photographic nature of the cinematic image is of key concern for contemporary film theorists who attempt to isolate the ways in which the photographic aspect of the cinematic image contributes to the production of ideology. In this section we will review some of their arguments.

However, before turning directly to what contemporary film theorists contend about photography, it is helpful to situate their position within the context of the history of film theory. The photographic nature of film is an issue around which the major movements of film theory have taken shape. Indeed, probably the most comprehensive viewpoint with which one can organize the history of film theory is to focus on the alternative accounts of the role of photography in successive theoretical formulations. That is, the contesting, attempted clarifications and alternative assessments of film's relation to photography provides us with a continuous line of controversy which makes what most would agree are the major movements in film theory stand out in stark relief.

Broadly speaking, these movements are:

A. *The Creationists,* such as Arnheim, Balasz, the Soviet montagists, and such later day proponents as Lindgren. Roughly, the creationists hold that the appropriate role of film is to manipulate and to reconstitute reality, *overcoming,* thereby, photography's inclination toward mechanically recording it.

B. *The Realists,* such as Panofsky, Kracauer, most notably Bazin, and, in some respects, Cavell. For the realist, the cinema, in various ways, should record and reproduce reality in accordance with its photographic origin.

C. *The Psychosemiotic Marxists* who comprise the vast majority of practicing film theorists today and to whom we have consistently referred as contemporary film theorists. This group is committed to isolating the ideological resources available to cinema, and for many of them, photography, insofar as it is said to impart the impression of reality, naturalness, or transparency, is a major mechanism of ideological persuasion.

These three groups of theoreticians can be characterized contrastively by what, on the surface, initially appears to be their radically different assessments of the photographic element of cinema. These assessments, moreover, emerge in the course of a neatly plottable, historical dialogue.

The creationists can be thought of as beginning the dialogue about

photography in film theory. But the creationists themselves were reacting to views about photography that were common in the nineteenth century. These latter views centered on the idea that a photograph was merely a mechanical reproduction of reality. What was often at stake in these assertions was whether or not a photograph could be art. By maintaining that a photograph was merely a mechanical duplication of reality, the enemy of photography was denying that photographs could project the imaginative and personal viewpoint of an artist. The photograph was not an expression of a viewpoint but a piece of nature ground out by a machine. The underlying contrasts in this debate were photography versus art, prosaic imitation versus expression, the machine versus temperament, a sheerly causal process versus intelligent action. Emile Zola displays this deprecation of photography when he writes:

> The individual element, man, is infinitely variable; as much as in his creation as in his temperaments. If temperament had not existed, all paintings would have of necessity to be simple photos.[14]

This view continues into the twentieth century and is echoed by Croce who claims:

> if by imitation of nature be understood that art gives mechanical reproduction, more or less perfect duplicates of natural objects, in the presence of which is renewed the same tumult caused by natural objects, then the proposition (that art is the imitation of nature) is evidently false. . . . if photography have in it anything artistic it transmits the intuition of the photographer, his point of view, in the pose and grouping which he has striven to attain. And if photography be not quite art, that is because the element of nature in it remains more or less unconquered and ineradicable. Do we ever indeed feel complete satisfaction before even the best of photographs?[15]

The consensus of turn of the century aestheticians to Croce's rhetorical question was "no." Photos were not art because they were merely mechanical duplications of reality. Thus, when Clive Bell searches for a way in which to cashier a painting from the order of art, he likens its achievement to the slavish imitation available in "cinematographic pictures."[16]

In order to show that film could be an art, and this was the first historic task of film theory, creationists had to demonstrate that film could be more than a mere mechanical recording of reality. However, the manner in which they pursued this goal often involved them in sharing at least two assumptions with the opponents of film and photography, viz., (1) that if film was to be an art, it would have to be more than merely imitative—it would have to afford expressive or formal values over and above verisimilitude, and (2)

that, in some sense, it is feasible to think that there is a zero degree of visual style, conceived of as *the mere reproduction of reality,* to which a film or a photo might descend.

Creationists thought that film should not be used to mechanically reproduce reality but to interpret it. But in regarding mechanical reproduction as a danger to be overcome, they, in effect, were agreeing that in some respect it is plausible to think that in certain lamentable cases film and photography might be truly describable as mere mechanical reproductions. That is, in accepting mere mechanical reproduction as the pertinent foil in the film-as-art argument, they acknowledged the feasibility of the idea that film could be meaningfully said to mechanically reproduce reality.

The strategy that creationists adopted to demonstrate that film is an art revolved around showing the ways in which the cinematic image diverged from a perfect duplication of reality and, furthermore, how such divergences could be employed for expressive purposes. High and low angle shots were frequent examples in this regard. The distortions in scale that resulted from such camera positions could be used expressively to signal, alternatively, power or weakness, among other things. Editing, of course, represented a major departure from a perfect recording of the space-time continuum and received special attention from creationist film theorists, especially the Soviet montagists.

Through editing and other devices, the creationists urged it was possible for filmmakers to not slavishly imitate reality but to interpretively reconstitute it. The filmmaker need not merely record the world; he or she could create worlds—worlds of works of art. The importance of the creative potential of cinema was seen as standing in an inverse ratio to the importance of photography, i.e., the recording element in cinema. Montagists were especially dismissive of the weight to be accorded photography in cinematic representation, arguing instead that the significance of any shot depended on its place in an edited array. But even outside of editing, the potential for distortive yet expressive stylization within the shot was emphasized. The road to film art lay in working against the recording potentials of photography for the sake, most often, of heightened expressivity. Photography was the *bête noire* of the creationist. It raised the possibility that following the least and worst line of resistance, cinema would degenerate into mere recording.

Of course, the very notion of a mere mechanical recording is a complex and probably, ultimately, confused one. At the very least it superimposes several not necessarily related ideas. Film is said to be mechanical because it is machine-based. But this should have caused no problems for cinema's

prospects in regard to either expressivity or art. For surely a piano is a machine, but that has never led anyone to deny that one can express oneself by means of it nor that art can be made by it. "Mechanical" obviously must mean more than "machine-produced" in this argument. In fact, it appears to have meant unimaginative, uninspired, inexpressive, banal, prosaic, etc. And probably it was thought that insofar as a camera is a machine, it made such results more likely. But there was never really any reason to think this since, again, pianos, and even paint brushes, are machines of sorts, involved in predictable physical processes once set in motion. That is, where "mechanical" really means "uninspired" we should blame the artist not the machine. If photography was ever mechanical in this sense, the problem was with the photographers and not the medium.

Moreover, if mere mechanical reproduction was taken to mean a perfect (because automatic and unmediated) representation of reality, then it has never been clear that there are such things; for there is no camera that is fully automatic, no representation in any ***medium*** that is un***mediated***, and no representation of reality that is "perfect" except in terms of the human interests, uses, and subtending viewpoints the representation is intended to serve. Creationists might have been better advised to reject the idea of "a mere recording of reality" as absurd, rather than acknowledging it as an albeit negative potential of cinema. However, they suffered the myth to flourish, perhaps as a scarefying bogeyman, and the myth continues to be given credence in various forms to the present day.

Creationist film theory correlates roughly with the period of silent film and remained powerful into the late thirties. Moreover, it reflects the values of the filmmakers of that period, who, in an effort to make their medium into an art, emphasized overt stylization. This is evident not only in the development of assertive styles of editing but in movements such as what is called the German Expressionist cinema. Indeed, the sight gag perfected by American comics can be seen as part and parcel of the anti-recording animus of silent film since it is based on the principle of not presenting reality as such but in terms of presenting an event from two simultaneous but diverging viewpoints: the false perspective of the comic butt and the accurate state of affairs as seen by the audience. Sight gags, that is, do not re-present reality, but rather present conflicting views of reality. By the end of the silent period, many of the assertive styles developed in the twenties were melded into one grand international style in such films as *Sunrise*, which unified the self-declaiming, overt artifice of German Expressionism and its penchant for camera movement with American glamor photography and sight gags, self-indulgent special effects, and editing strategies derived from the Soviets.

With the emergence of sound, many of the pyrotechnics of silent film receded, at first due in part to expediency but also gradually by choice. New approaches to film exposition began to appear along with new tastes. In short order, in the late thirties and early forties, a new approach to film theory began to emerge as a way of better rationalizing certain tendencies in cinema—such as the work of Renoir, and later of Welles,Wyler, and the Italian Neo-Realists—than was available to creationist theory. This was realist theory.

Whereas the recording aspect of photography was the aesthetic embarrassment of the creationists, the realists made it the fulcrum of their approach to film. The relation between creationists and realists is classically dialectical. The creationists "no" to photography is met by a realist affirmation. In terms of the creationist anxiety over the art-versus-photography antithesis, the realist responded "too bad for art." For if film is an art, then it must be greeted as an utterly unique one, not one that refers to reality by proposing images that resemble it, but one that literally records reality, one that literally re-presents it. That is, due to its photographic base, the relation of a film image to its referent is one of identity, not resemblance—the film image is identical to its referent due to the special causal processes involved in photography. The film image does not just resemble its referent after the fashion of a painting but is exactly identical to its referent—it is a precise tracing in light of something that actually existed before the camera lens. The cinematic image is taken as a mechanical reproduction of reality by the realist and this is regarded positively.

Moreover, the realist takes this analysis of the cinematic image to imply that due to the unique character of cinematic representation—best thought of as cinematic re-presentation (presentation again)—cinematic styles that approximate recording are to be endorsed in opposition to the assertive stylizations of silent film. It is as if in a gesture of ingratitude—after creationist theory won legitimacy for film—it was no longer necessary to adhere to aesthetic standards predicated on expressive artifice. Instead, the photographic-recording dimension of the medium could be indulged without recrimination, the battle for film art having already been decisively won. Various realist styles of filmmaking, employing long takes and minimizing editing, were favored from the forties into the sixties. The realist style of visual exposition was purportedly grounded in the belief that due to its photographic component, cinema, ontologically, was an essentially realist art, that is an art somehow distinctively rooted in reality.

This position was most powerfully stated by André Bazin. For him cinematic representation was utterly unique. The cinematic image, due to photography, does not merely look like its referent, as one might say of a

drawing, but the photographic image *is* identical to its referent because photography can be seen as a mold or a tracing literally generated by the object standing before the camera. The image we see on the screen literally re-presents reality because that is how the camera operates. If film is a mechanical recording that is its strength—no other medium can literally duplicate reality. Similar views about the nature of cinematic and photographic representation can be found in the writings of Cavell, Barthes, and Sontag, while somewhat less extreme explications of the essentially realist nature of cinematography are available in Panofsky, Kracauer, and Perkins.

The strongest statement of the realist theory of film, one predicated on the thesis that photographic representation is uniquely re-presentational, is nothing short of logically incoherent. The theory states that each cinematic image literally re-presents the object that caused it to be by being identical to a mold or like a tracing to the object or person that gave rise to it. The close-up of Gloria Swanson literally re-presents Gloria Swanson because in terms of patterns of light it matches those rebounding off Gloria Swanson, contour for contour, and Gloria Swanson was the object that caused the photo to be. For any photo or cinematic shot, there exists an object that it matches as a tracing. But this theory quickly leads us into insufferable perplexity.

Imagine that we take three shots of the self-same person, assuring that the image of the person is the same screen size in each of our shots. However, also imagine that we take our respective shots with three different lenses—a wide-angle lens, a telephoto lens, and a normal lens. Now the theory of re-presentation tells us that each of these shots will be identical to a mold with its subject. Furthermore, identity is a logically transitive relation—if x is identical to y, and y is identical to z, then x is identical to z. However, though each of our shots is putatively identical to its subject, even the untrained eye can see that our shots are not identical to each other. Thus, the re-presentational theory of the unique identity relation of photographic images to their referents, when added to some easily established facts about lenses, leads to a contradiction.

Nor will it help matters to argue that the theory only pertains to what are called normal lenses. For that has changed over history in a way that will allow us to reproduce our counter-example with three candidates for the title of normal lens from three different periods of film history. Moreover, it will not strengthen the theory to say that what is re-presented is not a precise tracing of light but an imprint of light. For a flash pan records and re-presents an imprint of light but one that need not be recognizable and, therefore, need not be representational (mimetically, that is). But a realist

theory of film, where the images in question are not representational, is clearly the antithesis of realism à la Bazin, however much it may gladden the hearts of modernists.

Most contemporary film theorists reject the realist theory of film. They do not do so on the grounds of the logical considerations just sketched but more on the grounds that, contra-realism, it is difficult to conceive of a film image as an automatic re-presentation of reality in any persuasively characterizable sense of the word "automatic." A camera is generally adjusted by an agent with some purpose in mind and that purpose guides the characterization we encounter of the referent of the image. The camera does not simply duplicate reality; it is not a mere mechanical recording of reality in any sense that suggests its results lie outside human practices and purposes. We are not faced by chunks of unmediated reality when we gaze upon photographic images but intentional objects. That is, where the realist theorist speaks as though the cinematic image were some sort of natural object, the contemporary theorist would hold that the cinematic image is always the product of a signifying practice. Thus, most contemporary film theorists reject the most extreme ontological claims of realist theorists. The psychosemiotic Marxist maintains that film is not an automatic or mere mechanical reproduction of reality. Indeed, insofar as the contemporary film theorist holds that film is necessarily a signifying practice, she disagrees with everyone—both of the creationist and realist camp—who thinks the mere recording of reality to be a possibility.

However, here the plot thickens. For though most contemporary film theoreticians reject the realist ontology of the cinematic image, many psychosemiotic Marxists accept what can be called the realist phenomenology of the cinematic image. That is, contemporary theorists reject the idea that a film image pristinely re-presents reality—after all it is part of a process of signification. But, at the same time, they believe that films give the impression of being re-presentations of reality to spectators. The realist theory is ontologically incorrect but nevertheless it does, for certain contemporary film theorists, afford an account of how spectators regard film images. That is, film images do not really duplicate reality, however they do give the impression that they duplicate reality. Photography is, of course, crucial here. And furthermore it is this impression that is key to an understanding of the ideological machinations of film.

For the impression of reality imparted by the film image is what is conducive to the ideological persuasiveness of the film. That is, a photographically mimetic characterization in a film will, according to many contemporary film theorists, promote the impression in spectators that what is portrayed is the way the world is, because film imparts the *impression*

of re-presenting reality. The film in all its ideological extravagances is accepted by spectators as an unmediated reproduction of reality. Put crudely, psychosemiotic Marxists reject Bazin's theory of the ontology of film for themselves but, so to speak, attribute a belief in it to ordinary spectators.

Whereas Bazinians applauded the realistic effect of cinema, contemporary film theorists find this phenomenon and its exploitation for the purposes of ideology morally abhorrent, and they dedicate themselves to disabusing the world of the myth of cinematic realism. Yet, they do agree with people like Bazin that film causes this reality impression in spectators. Where psychosemiotic Marxists diverge from Bazin in terms of cinema's impression of reality is in their evaluation of its moral worth. Thus there is much agreement as well as disagreement within the history of film theory. Creationists accept the possibility that film may merely mechanically reproduce reality but find this aesthetically abhorrent. Realists, in turn, respond by finding the mechanical duplication of reality aesthetically and morally commendatory. Psychosemioticians come at the debate obliquely, stressing, like creationists, the intentionalist nature of photography, but hold that this is characteristically masked in such a way that viewers in their naive state erroneously endorse something like the realist re-presentation theory of photography. Contemporary theorists agree with the realists, then, that cinema imparts an impression of reality, but they find in this the shame rather than the glory of film insofar as it is this supposed impression of reality that facilitates ideology.

Where the realist claimed that photography re-presents reality, the contemporary film theorist psychologizes that ontological claim by asserting that the photograph and the cinematic image cause the impression of reality (here understood not in Baudry's sense of charged reality but in the illusionistic sense). This, of course, is a claim that requires some explanation since, among other things, normal percipients in normal viewing conditions appear to have no problem distinguishing films from their referents. Thus, the contemporary theorists must explain the origin of this photographic impression of reality on the way to explaining the way in which once this impression is in place it reinforces the ideological import of such cinematic images by implying that what is photographically represented claims for itself the authority to assert "And that's the way it is."

Recent attempts at offering such explanations are to be found in *Ideology and the Image* by Bill Nichols and *Visible Fictions* by John Ellis.[17] It is to those accounts that we now turn.

Nichols' approach relies on buying into a certain view of the psychology of perception. He holds that the mind deals with its sensory input by means of organizing it in accordance with a code which then permits the input to

be translated by further processing operations. Moreover, Nichols believes that the code that is operative in perception is an iconic code—one in which the relation of the signs in this code to their referent in the world is one of resemblance or analogy. The code in question is rather like an internal picture. Nichols says:

> Our perception of the physical world is also based on codes involving iconic signs. The world does not enter our mind nor does it deposit a picture of itself there spontaneously. Perception depends on coding the world into iconic signs that can represent it within our mind. The force of the apparent identity is enormous, however. We think that it is the world itself we see in our ordinary "mind's eye" rather than a coded picture of it. (p. 11)

Moreover, these codes are essentially cultural in nature.

> The variability of the everyday world becomes translated by reference to less variable codes. The environment becomes a text to be read like any other text. To not know the codes maintained by a given culture is tantamount to being an illiterate infant wandering through an unintelligible world. (p. 26)

Perception relies upon cultural codes that are iconic and that are employed unconsciously. What has this theory of perception to do with film? Well, film, via photography, is like perception in that it relies on iconic codes. Nichols says, "It is not reality up there on the silver screen but iconic signs that re-present reality" (p. 11). And since cinematic images operate by way of iconic images—just as perception is said to—Nichols believes that it is possible to confuse one for the other. He writes:

> Since images bear an analogous or iconic relationship to their referent (a relationship of resemblance), it is easy to confuse the realms of the image and the physical world by treating the image as a transparent window (especially the photographic image), or by treating the physical world idealistically by assuming that something like its essence has been transferred or reproduced in the image. Many films employing realist styles encourage such a confusion, and yet it is essential to remember that a film is not reality any more than an image is what it re-presents. (p. 24)

Indeed,

> We might even say, metaphorically, that realist images are an objectification, or projection of the normal perceptual process. What our nervous system initially encountered as unorganized sensory input is now encountered as the organized or signifying output of these objectification, or images. (p. 24)

So the impression of reality is caused by photography because photography works in iconic codes, not only reproducing our cultural way of seeing

but presenting it as natural. This, in turn, not only reinforces cultural ways of seeing, but the impression of reality of the cinematic image effectively imputes some veracity to whatever it shows.

There are a surprising number of things wrong with Nichols' account, but luckily there is a short way to dispose of his theory. Nichols holds that perception depends on coding the world into iconic signs that can be represented within our mind. This coding is reinforced by cinema which also exploits it for ideological purposes. But what of the underlying notion of perception—will it wash?

Nichols' account of perception suggests a three stage process: first, there is the object in the world which, second, is transformed into an iconically coded sensum which, third, the mind translates. But this seems radically implausible.

The sensum and the referent look alike. Therefore, if the mind can translate the sensum why can't it process the object directly without the intervention of the sensum? That is, why postulate the iconic step? But, of course, if Nichols loses the iconic step, his theory of the cinematic image disappears. On the other hand, if Nichols responds that the mind can't process the object directly, then we can ask how it can process the iconically coded sensum, since the sensum looks like the referent. It seems, then, that there will have to be another coding phase postulated in order to decipher the second stage sensum. But if that third stage code is iconic, it too will resemble the object which we are unable to perceive without iconic coding. So a third stage, iconically coded sensum will require a fourth stage coded sensum for translation, and so on.

One may say that these intervening coded sensums are not iconic, and that this will stop the regress. But that leads us to ask why the possibility of non-iconic processing was not considered at stage two of Nichols' scenario. In short, it seems that Nichols' theory of perception founders because it will commit us to an infinite regress of iconic sensums, or it will have to admit the possibility of non-iconic processing or even of direct perception. But either of these alternatives will deprive Nichols of the cornerstone of his theory of the ideological operation of the cinematic image.

Another way to make this point is to note that Nichols' theory of perception, like so many of the psychological models propounded by contemporary film theorists, is an homunculus theory. The mind that translates the iconically coded sensum is just like the person perceiving the object at one remove. This must be the case, since the sensum looks like the object. But nothing of theoretical value is gained by postulating this "inner" perceiver; for if there is a problem explaining how the person perceives the object, all those problems will be, so to speak, brought inside, when it

comes to the internal perceiver's perception of the iconically coded sensum, since it looks just like the object. Indeed, as I have suggested, it seems likely that this way of characterizing perception will land us with an infinite number of homunculi, each requiring its own inner perceiver to translate the preceding, iconic sensum. And, of course, if Nichols theory of perception is wrong, then his theory of both the impression of reality imparted by the photographic element of film and the consequent theory of film's ideological operation fail.

Like Nichols, John Ellis attempts to account for the impression of reality in cinema by characterizing the film situation as analogous to our normal practice of perception in such a way that we easily misrecognize our perception of film for a perception of reality. And this, in turn, leads us to accept what is on the screen as "the way things are." He writes:

> The ideology of vision that we inhabit is one that thinks of the eyes as projecting a beam of light, like a torch-beam, that illuminates what we look at, making it visible and perceptible. The arrangement of projection in the entertainment cinema that developed in the West exactly parallels this ideology of vision: it too presents a beam of light, coming from a source behind the spectator's head, which widens out to illuminate a scene for perception. The beam of light from the projector parallels the beam of light from the eyes. On this basis, it can be said that the first identification that takes place in cinema is with the apparatus of projection. A profound homology is experienced between the cinematic spectacle and the activity of perception of it. They are identified, rather than perceived as complementary activities, or opposed forms of activity.[18]

Here Ellis is speaking of what Baudry called the apparatus rather than the photographic image per se. However, like Nichols, he thinks that the projection of the cinematic image affords a probable confusion of screen perception and natural perception. This argument depends on postulating what might be thought of as a searchlight theory of vision in which beams of illumination shoot out of our eyes after the fashion of the first posters advertising Universal's *Frankenstein* in the thirties. But one wonders whether this conception of perception is really widespread. It is true that Arabic astronomer Al Hazen criticized something like the views Ellis attributes to all of us in his eleventh-century treatise *The Elements of Optics,* but the proponents of those theories are long dead and their ideas rather recherché by now. Nor does it seem appropriate to attribute arcane philosophical theories to contemporary spectators. We do not confuse the projector beam with our "perceptual beams" because we do not think we have "perceptual beams."

What Ellis and Nichols are both trying to supply is a mechanism that

accounts for why we do not notice the difference between a cinematographic projection and perception. Both attempt this by postulating analogies between photographic processes and some imputed dimension of perception. The match is then said to be powerful enough to block us from noticing the difference. However, the mechanisms Nichols and Ellis offer are absurd, though absurd in different ways.

In defense of what Nichols and Ellis are attempting, it may be said that they want to call attention to the fact that, in watching cinematic images, we do not characteristically dwell on the fact that they are photographic. Though such a recognition may always be available to us, we choose, for the most part, to bracket it from the forefront of our attention. We attend to what such images represent and not to the fact that they are representations. This type of overlooking might be described as regarding the image as *natural,* a key term for contemporary film theorists. And that photographic images are perceived as natural—it might be claimed—is undeniable, even if Nichols and Ellis have misdescribed the psychic mechanisms that induce this.

But I wonder if it is appropriate to describe ourselves as regarding such images as natural. Suppose we look at a photo of a black soldier saluting a French flag. We do not regard this as natural in any literal sense—i.e., as a product of nature divorced from culture. If what is meant by saying that we regard the photo as natural is that it, like millions of advertisements, does not strike us as a bizarre juxtaposition of elements, then that is a special sense of "natural." It might be better to say that we are familiar with such photos and juxtapositions, and even complacent about their meanings.

But if it is complacency that we are talking about, then the explanation for that is probably not located in photography, for we are also complacent about non-photographic images. Instead, we should attempt to explain our complacency in terms of how we came to have that enduring disposition which undoubtedly involves an account of our participation in a culture which conditions us to respond to the massive bombardment of images in a complacent way. That is, there is no special photo effect in our example; rather there is a type of conditioning that is relevant not only to the visual artifacts of our culture. We happen to be complacent about that with which we are familiar. This accounts for our failure to batten upon both ideological messages in images as well as various other details of everyday life.

Complacency is not peculiarly engendered by photography. Rather familiarity is the major lever. But if the contemporary film theorist attempts to explicate the naturalization effect in terms of familiarity, the brief against photography will be displaced. For most contemporary film theorists are

conventionalists as regards representation. Thus, they can imagine representational systems radically different from the mimetic picture—systems, for example, in which something that looked like large Pollock drip paintings supplied the vocabulary of portraiture. We might become very familiar with this type of representation and with familiarity would come naturalization. So understood in terms of familiarity, naturalization can have no peculiar connection with photography. Indeed, one wonders why, given their conventionalism, contemporary film theorists want to stress a privileged role for photography.

However, contemporary film theorists seem bent on finding a special naturalizing effect that is special to the cinematic image. Ellis' primary proposal is an example that can be thought of as essentialism psychologized. Beginning with an analysis of the impression of photography much like Bazin's, Ellis goes on to suggest that this accounts for film's naturalizing impression. He writes:

> From the point of view of the spectator (the point of view for which cinema exists) the cinematic illusion is a very particular one: it is the illusion of something that has passed, which probably no longer exists. The cinema image is marked by a particular half-magic feat in that it makes present something that is absent. The moment shown on the screen is passed and gone when it is called back into being as illusion. The figures and places shown are not present in the same space as the viewer. The cinema makes present the absent: this is the irreducible separation that cinema maintains (and attempts to abolish), the fact that objects and people are conjured up yet not known to be present. Cinema is present absence: it says "This is was." (pp. 58–59)

Ellis continues by explaining that

> the present absence of the cinematic image and sound enables cinema to adopt a particular mode of narration which can be called "historic."
>
> The historic mode of narration involves the use of forms that do not explicitly acknowledge the presence of the viewer.
>
> Such forms as direct address (where a character speaks directly "out" of the screen as "I" to a "you," the audience) are extremely rare in cinema. . . . Direct address makes explicit the relationship between the viewer and the subject of the look; the historic mode does the opposite. Events take place as though they came from nowhere. Events told in the historic mode of narration are told by no one, they have no origin, no motivating intelligence. "Who is telling this story?" is not a question that is addressed in a classic entertainment film. . . . Instead, the story unfolds: it seems as though reality itself is telling itself, almost unaware that it is being watched. This charac-

> terises the historic mode of narration: reality unfolds itself. . . . The effect of historic narration depends upon the photo effect. It depends on the sense that the photo effect brings of the completeness of the actions before the projection of the film begins. The film is always already complete, a record of something that predates the projection. The historic mode depends upon the fact that it has a story to tell, a story which is completed at the outset, yet unrolls as though it were in the present. Present absence thus creates a sense of the presence, yet self-containedness of the cinematic fiction, taking place in its spaces and times, in a separation from the viewer who nevertheless can experience the spurious presence of those events and people.
>
> The historic mode, characterised by its sense of reality narrating itself, can thus be seen to rely upon the photo effect. The historic mode is one of the lynchpins of the notion of cinema-as-reality because it enables discussion of cinematic events to take place without any acknowledgment of their status as cinematic fictions. . . . Cinema, in the historic mode of narration, can be discussed as though it were events and characters alone. This is the product of one theory of realism, the theory of the transparency of cinema as a window on the world. However, the historic mode of narration is not this simple. It is not an absence of narration, but the appearance of the absence of narration. It crucially depends upon the photo effect, that is, on the absence of the events represented as much as on the illusion of their presence. (pp. 59–61)

In this passage, Ellis claims that cinematography reinforces the transparency effect of the sort of narrative characteristic of entertainment cinema which is called "historic narration." In order to assess Ellis' claim, then, we must have some notion of what this transparency effect is supposed to involve. The discussion of this transparency effect is generally introduced by a discussion of the linguist Benveniste's distinction between two modes of expression which are referred to, in the literature, as discourse and as history (or, sometimes, simply as "story").[19] In speech or narration that is dubbed "history" or "story" or "historic narration," there is no mention of "you" or "I." "After May '68, a mighty film theory arose" is an example of history or historic narration. In discourse, on the other hand, reference to a speaker is included in the utterance: "Verily I say unto you, after May '68 a mighty film theory arose" is discourse. Narration in the mode of history is said to impart the impression that it is authorless, that it is an instance of events or "reality" appearing, deceptively by all accounts, to narrate themselves. Realist representation, including entertainment films, are supposed to exemplify the historic mode of narration.

Why is this transparency effect ideologically significant to contemporary theorists? They believe that the lack of reference to a speaker can be thought of as the suppression of the acknowledgment of the representational appa-

ratus and of the situation of utterance (the production of the representation) which includes the suppression of reference to or of the acknowledgment of the interests that motivate the utterance (or representation). The historic mode of narration is ideological because it imparts the impression that the representation is authorless which implies that it results from no interests whatsoever, ideological or otherwise, or that the production, since it appears authorless, lacks any variety of point of view.[20] Historic narration, that is, masks its motivations, a very serviceable gambit for disseminating ideology.

Though Benveniste introduced the history/discourse distinction with reference to language, contemporary film theorists like Ellis and Metz are willing to extend it to film.[21] Ellis also holds that the photographic aspect of cinema enhances the effectiveness of historic narration by giving the movie the aura of presenting a past, and therefore a completed action, thereby enhancing the apparent self-sufficiency of the narrative and its apparent disconnection from a present production of meaning. In literature, the historic mode of narration corresponds to the use of the "past definite" tense; in film, the pastness, i.e., the re-presentational nature, of the photographic image takes up this function. Metz says of the function of tense in historic narration that "the narrative plenitude and transparency of this kind of film is based on a refusal to admit that anything is lacking . . . ," which when connected to Ellis' discussion suggests that photography calls into action the operation of the Imaginary in order to yield the appearance of reality narrating itself, sans author, sans motive, sans everything.

It is hard to know where to begin listing the problems with this account; let us start with the idea of transparency, understood as the appearance of reality narrating itself. Can it really be the case that by adopting the historic mode of narration, a realist representation, or text, brings its audience to believe that the representation is none other than events or "reality" narrating itself? If the realist text in question is a novel, one wonders why the title page is not enough to establish that the book has an author? And in theater, there are program notes, on paintings there are signatures, and in movies, of course, there are credit sequences at the beginning and end of the film. Moreover, if we are to extend the transparency effect to advertisements, then there are the featured brand names that make the interests motivating the representation quite apparent. These devices certainly should dissuade audiences of normal intelligence from taking these items to hail from nowhere.

Indeed, what would it take for a realist representation to have the effect of appearing as an event narrating itself? The very notion sounds peculiar,

even mystical. It is even more esoteric than a representation appearing, via illusion, as a "real event." At least we have a grasp of what is meant by "real event," and can suggest what it would take to feign the appearance of one. But what is involved in "reality narrating itself," over and above the illusion of reality? A close encounter of the third kind with a Hegelian zeitgeist? And what would that be like?

Is the notion of an authorless narrative even comprehensible? If a realist representation is intelligible, we irresistably infer that some sentient agency executed it. A literally authorless narrative would rend our conceptual scheme. If, when reading a novel, we were suddenly taken with the conviction—albeit obscure to define—that the events that comprise the book were narrating themselves (!), we would be as dumbfounded as we would be by the sight of the Pentagon levitating and turning orange as the result of Yippie chanting. The notion of an intelligible narrative as sui generis violates our sense of natural order. Nor do we have any idea of what it would take for an intelligible novel or film to override this natural prejudice (if indeed it is merely a "prejudice"). Certainly omitting references to an authorial "I," and especially a fictional "I," will not turn the trick. Instilling the impression that a novel is authorless, I submit, is strictly speaking just impossible. Normal audiences can not be deluded into believing that novels and films are authorless, nor do I understand what plausible interests the creators of novels and films could possibly have in convincing us that their works are authorless. Moreover, if contemporary theorists complain that I have taken literally what is meant metaphorically, then I must point out that this metaphor is spoken of as if it described a state that has certain effects—in promoting ideological acquiescence—whose sequence makes no sense if "authorlessness" is, in fact, only a metaphor.

But perhaps it will be felt that I am too quick to reject the notion of an authorless representation. What if, in an act of statistical wonderment, the waves at Jones Beach threw up an assortment of sea shells whose arrangement—astoundingly—"spelt out" a replica of *Les Misérables*, or better yet, a hitherto unwritten short story. Would not that be an authorless narrative and could that not serve as the model of authorless narration: The answer, I take it, to the former query, is no; for if we knew the way in which the arrangement of sea shells came about, we would, I think, just deny that it is a representation—so deep is our conviction that representations and narratives have authors. Thus, the likely answer to our second query is that these shells are not plausible models for authorless narration, for they do not compose a narrative at all.

Ellis appears to offer us behavioral criteria for authorless narration, viz.,

when people speak of the events in the film as if they were a sequence of events rather than a sequence of representations. But then if this is a criterion of authorless narration, then such narration does not appear to be a consequence of the historic mode. For people describe the events in *Murder My Sweet* as they report a work in the historic mode even though Marlowe's *discourse* is included on the sound track.

Contemporary theorists use the distinction between history and discourse as a means of identifying realist texts across media, including film. Realism is associated with the historic mode of narration, and this, of course, is why it is ideologically dangerous. For with the historical mode comes the transparency effect. But it does seem rather mistaken to believe that the corpus of realist representation, even conceived in the way the contemporary do, can be assimilated to the historic mode of narration. Aren't Goethe's *Young Werther,* Smollet's *Roderick Random,* epistolary novels and so on, in general, full of *discourse* and if we extend the history/discourse distinction beyond literature, aren't Rembrandt's self-portraits and Frank Perdue's chicken advertisements discourse too? And Carlos Fuentes' *Aura,* a rather predictable and standard ghost story, incessantly addresses us in the second person.

Of course, many traditional films—e.g., *I Remember Mama, DOA, Double Indemnity, How Green Was My Valley, Sunset Boulevard*—have narrators who refer to themselves, while the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* ("You're next!") and the *Creation of the Humanoids* address the audience in the second person. Are such films to be considered nonstandard—traditional films that are discourse rather than historic narration? But surely these are standard films, and their use of the first and second person is perfectly within the norms of Hollywood-style filmmaking. So if Hollywood filmmaking is supposed to be realist according to contemporary theorists, then it cannot be the case that realism is characterized by historic narration.

It may be argued that these counterexamples miss their mark because in most of the preceding cases what is referred to are fictional narrators, not actual authors. But I am not sure that this distinction is relevant to the history/discourse distinction as Benveniste draws it. Nor is it clear why, if reference to the actual author is key, that such reference is only deemed important through the deployment of first person pronouns. For surely works of classic realism may indeed contain references to the actual author, and, for that matter, to the audience of the representation. Thackeray refers to himself jokingly in *Vanity Fair,* Fielding acknowledges himself and the reader in *Tom Jones* (Bk I, chap. 4), while many televised, used car salesmen, if we are to take their ads as examples of realist representations, include

actual dealers addressing us ("You can't beat this anywhere!") unabashedly. And in film, it is hardly nonstandard in a travelogue or a documentary to be addressed by an author directly, or by someone reading the author's lines. The notion of authorless transparency as well as attendent claims about its correlation with the historic mode of discourse just do not fit the data contemporary theorists wish to describe.

Nor is it clear why discourse, the mere inclusion of first and second person reference, enjoins a reminder of the author's role, or why lack of such references cause the impression that the work is authorless. How would the lack of the use of such reference overcome our presumption that someone, generally someone whose name is available to us, contrived the narrative. Of course, even greater difficulties arise when the putatively linguistic distinction between history and discourse is extended to nonverbal aspects of visual media such as painting and film. For surely in these cases the symbol system in question lacks a system for demarcating person (as well as tense indexes apart from verbal ones). And, of course, most mysterious of all is the notion that somehow inclusion or exclusion of first and second person reference, and of whatever their supposed pictorial equivalents are taken to be, would result, respectively, in the awareness or unawareness of the motives and interests, especially the ideological ones, that underlie a given representation. Of course, it is true that most films that have ideological commitments do not come out and say "The ideological commitments of this film are thus and so." But if this is the rather obvious and well-known point that contemporary film theorists wish to make, they have no reason to advert to the purported linguistic distinction between discourse and historic narration. That ideologues do not identify themselves has nothing to do with abstract linguistic categories.

Ellis claims that the cinematic image, in virtue of its photographic dimension, underpins the historic narration of the popular, realist film. Perhaps in this he feels that the imputed "pastness" of the cinematic image serves a role comparable to that which Metz, following Benveniste, feels the past definite tense plays in historic narration in literature. However, it must be stressed that film does not, strictly speaking, have a system of tenses. Nor does it make any sense to say that film is always in the past tense (or, as is often also claimed, that film is in the present tense). For the phenomenon of tense is only comprehensible within a system, and a language or media putatively possessing only one tense would not be a system. That is, the claim that film is always in the past tense is as good as the claim that film is always in the present tense, which is to say, it is not very good at all. Attempting to identify film with a single tense is tantamount to admitting that the category of tense is inapplicable to film.

Film is often said to be an art that manipulates time. So perhaps we should be willing to metaphorically extend the notion of tense to film. Flashforwards are future tense; flashbacks are past tense. Two things must be noted about such a metaphorical expansion. First, that these temporal articulations are not grounded in film, i.e., *the cinematic image,* but in the dialogue and the narrative. And, second, if this metaphoric expansion is permitted, it will be the wreck of the theory that film is always in the past tense (or always in the present or future tense). For if we grant that film avails itself of a system of tenses through dialogue and narrative, then we are committed to film, or at least specific films, having as many tenses as language has. That is, a film will have as many "tenses," or temporal articulations, as the dialogue and narrative develop. Thus, it will not be solely in the past tense. And if individual films are said to have more tenses than the past tense, it makes no sense to say that film, or even popular film, is always in the past tense.

Of course, Ellis might wish to defend his hypothesis about the cinematic image without reference to tense. He might say, instead, that all films, in virtue of their photographic elements, impart an aura of pastness. A cinematic image, as such, enjoins a sense of pastness. This is virtually to attribute Bazin's theory of the photographic image, as a phenomenological description, to every film spectator. Since Bazin's theory is insupportable, I am loathe to attribute it to spectators. Ordinary viewers usually have better sense about such things than film theorists.

I suppose that it is true that most spectators, being aware in some rough and ready way about how films are made, *know* that the film being projected for them was completed in the past, though, of course, it needs to be said that someone reading a printed novel also knows that the book was written prior to the reading. But, despite this knowledge, I am not sure that film viewers have the strong association with pastness, that Ellis attributes to them, with every photo and every cinematic image. Though I know that veal is made from young calves, this is not in the forefront of my attention when I eat it. But in Ellis' case, one would assume that the sense of pastness, that he associates with photography, would have to be somewhat effective on the spectator, if it is to reinforce the historic mode of narration.

Crucial to Ellis' argument is that every photo is a record. But even if it is true that, in principle (what about trick shots?), every photo could be used as a record of the state of affairs that gave rise to it, not every photo or cinematic image *is* used as a record. The photo of me standing next to a cardboard likeness of Reagan is used as a joke, not as a record of my afternoon on Times Square. Similarly, filmed fictions, and not just ones with trick shots, are not primarily records, and anyone who views them that

way either has got things wrong or has some pretty special interests (like figuring out whether so and so was a bit player in such and such a film). And where films and photos are not being used as records, there seems little reason to presume that attentive spectators are struck by their "pastness."

Needless to say, a particular film or image may exploit the association of photography with pastness, as was popular in Westerns, like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (e.g., the last image), a decade or so ago. But, in such cases, it is the internal structure of the film that mobilizes a sense of pastness. And, of course, most films do not emphasize the pastness of their images; the cinematography in *2001,* after the prologue, does not emphasize pastness but futurity. That is, even if pastness is one of our cultural associations with photos (though it remains less clear that pastness is a cultural association with movies, save, today, possibly silent ones), it remains for the individual work to take advantage of this association. Most films do not, and to that extent I am suspicious of Ellis' claim that an invariant sense of pastness accompanies every cinematic image in a way that bolsters the transparency effect of historic narration (if there is such a thing in film).

Ellis also associates a sense of completeness to the cinematographic image. This completeness purportedly contributes to the self-containedness of the film, which sort of completeness some contemporary film theorists might want to connect with the engagement of the Lacanian Imaginary by film. However, clearly several different, fallaciously equivocating, senses of "completeness" would have to be in motion for this argument to slide by. The cinematic image, if it is said to be complete, is complete in the sense that the moment, or string of moments, photographed are over or finished. On the other hand, the kind of "completeness" that is relevant to the impression of "self-containedness" a film affords pertains to whether or not the narrative has closure. The two senses of "completeness" are quite distinct, as one can see by stringing cinematic images of randomly selected events together. First, we see a glimpse of a 1911 soccer match, then a close-up of a dirty pot, then a shot from *Keys of the Kingdom,* followed by one from a Danish home movie, and so on randomly. Everything shown will be "finished," but will not contribute an aura of "self-containedness" to the melange. Individual photos and shots themselves are not necessarily complete in the sense of "self-contained." Also one can have a shot of an incomplete action such as my knocking over my glass when I reach for a drink. To the extent that Ellis' theory of the cinematic image links completeness in the sense that x is finished with completeness in the sense that x is "self-contained" or has closure, the

theory is a pun. Moreover, anyone who wishes to extend the theory and claim that the completeness Ellis associates with the cinematic image to the type of completeness that would affect the Lacanian Imaginary has merely compounded the hijinks, for an image that portrays something that is over need not portray anything that is whole in any sense; recall the shot of the bridge breaking apart in Bruce Conner's *A Movie*.[22]

PERSPECTIVE

Linear perspective is built into the motion picture camera so that when the latter is standardly used the result is a cinematic image perspectivally arranged. Linear perspective is based on the insight that parallel lines, receding into depth, project onto the human eye as convergent lines. So in "central" or "Albertian" perspective, parallel lines verge on a centralized vanishing point. When a picture of x follows the rules of perspective, it is said that the picture delivers a sheaf of light rays to an appropriately positioned viewer which is in pertinent respects, regarding orthogonals, isomorphic to the visual array that x would deliver to the fixed monocular station point of a viewer of x in the world. Linear perspective was developed intensively during the Renaissance and it is grounded in an optical theory of vision.

Perspective is a pictorial cue which engenders a strong impression (rather than illusion) of pictorial depth. It is not the only factor in a picture that affords a sense of depth; others include the comparative size of the objects portrayed, texture-density gradients, edge and overlap phenomena, the portrayal of shadows, the tendency for objects to lose detail at a distance, as well as the tendency of distant objects to turn bluish due to atmospheric impurities. However, though perspective is not the only means of conveying pictorial depth, it is a particularly powerful means. Moreover, perspective affords a high degree of pictorial fidelity. A snapshot of Times Square contains a great deal of accurate visual information. Looking at one you could derive accurate information about the relative locations of the various theaters and their distances from each other; you could tell how long it would take you to walk from the theater showing *Karate Kid, Part II* to the one showing *Cobra*.

Nevertheless, contemporary film theorists are very suspicious of perspective and regard it as an important factor in the propagation of ideology in cinema. Jean-Louis Comolli, explicating an argument of Marcelin Pleynet's, of which he approves, discusses the impregnation of the basic

(cinematic) apparatus by the Quattrocento code of perspective, whose significance he unpacks in terms of

> the hegemony of the eye, "visual-ization," and the ideology of the visible linked to the Western tradition of systems centered on a single point. The image produced by the camera could not fail to confirm and reinforce "the visual code defined by renaissant humanism" which placed the human eye at the center of the system of the other organs of senses: the eye (Subject) enthroned in the place of the divine (humanism's critique of Christianity).[23]

Here we see that perspective is thought of as a code or convention, and that it is complicit with something called "the ideology of the visible" which has nefarious metaphysical overtones. Moreover, contemporary film theorists see perspective as a mechanism that operates, along with the film's narrative, to position subjects in the sense discussed in the previous chapter on the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm. Stephen Heath, speaking of G. Ten Doesschate's description of perspective, writes:

> The component elements of that account should be noted: the possible exact match for the eye of picture and object, the deceptive illusion; the center of the illusion, the eye in place. What is fundamental is the idea of the spectator at a window, an *"aperta finestra"* that gives a view on the world—framed, centered, harmonious.[24]

The organization of space by perspective here is coincident with illusionary subject unity. Perspective implements subject positioning, literally suggesting a correct *place* for the spectator. Heath maintains:

> The film poses an image, not immediate or neutral, but posed, framed and centred. Perspective-system images bind the spectator in place, the suturing central position that is the sense of the image, that sets its scene (in place, the spectator completes that image as its subject).[25]

This view concerning perspective is dogma among contemporary film theorists; it can be and is asserted without argument in film analyses. Here is an example of Bill Nichols applying it to a scene from *The Birds* in which Melanie is looking out a window:

> This metaphorical dimension to the violence poised at the window in part turns on the principle of central perspective basic to the photographic lens (and its precursor: linear, renaissance perspective). The installation of the viewer as subject depends upon reserving a singular place for him or her, the reciprocal in front of the image of the vanishing point "behind" it, the point of origin from which the camera "took" its view and where we now take ours. The two-dimensional image, from the point of view of central perspective, stands in for the world it re-presents as would an ordinary window if the view

> beyond it could somehow be imprinted on its surface. This, incidentally, is precisely the metaphor elaborated by Leonardo da Vinci to describe how central perspective is achieved by a painter (and strikingly similar to the registration of a latent image on a film strip).
>
> The window that admits and frames the scene confirms the camera in its ascension to the fixed position of source or origin which we, in turn, are invited to assume. To launch an assault at the window is, in turn, to assault the place of the viewer; it is an act of aggression against the eye of the beholder and the "I" of the self-as-subject insofar as that "I" originates in the realm of the imaginary.[26]

The contemporary film theorist, then, believes that perspective is a code, that it is complicit with the "ideology of the visible," that it functions to produce subjects (in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense) by positioning spectators, and that it is appropriately described in the language of deceptive illusion. Later we shall also discuss its putative special relation with narrative. But let us now turn to an examination of the claims about perspective reviewed so far.

Since we have already spent much space discussing illusionism, we can be brief about the application of that concept to perspective images. Perspective causes an impression of depth but no deceptive illusion. One way to see this is to recall that the perspective image is drawn from a fixed monocular station point. But we characteristically view perspective pictures including cinematic images with two eyes. As well, we often change our position while perusing paintings and we can rotate our heads while viewing a movie image. These factors alone (though there are others) normally guarantee that we realize the projection is a flat surface and not really deep, though it may have *pictorial depth,* a technical term not referring to real, i.e., three-dimensional depth, but to the impression of depth a two-dimensional surface can impart. In fact, David Bordwell argues, successfully I think, that "Under normal viewing conditions, the greater a picture's perspectival depth, the *less* likely we are to be fooled."[27]

Contemporary film theorists are wont to say that perspective is a code, implying that perspective is a culturally rooted, pictorial convention, akin to using a halo as a sign of sainthood. For contemporary theorists, given their commitments to semiotics, a convention or code is arbitrary; it can always be otherwise, though it may appear to users of the cultural code that it is "natural" (rather than cultural and arbitrary). This propensity to appear natural, moreover, has important ideological potentials not only because it masks the cultural origin and signification of the phenomenon in question, such as perspective, but because it imbues whatever it organizes, however ideologically charged, with an aura of naturalness, the property of "that's-

the-way-it-is-ness." But before perspective can figure in an argument about its naturalizing potentials, it must be established that it is, in fact, coded or conventional.

Why presume that perspective is conventional? One argument might be that though perspective presents itself as a replica of vision, it is not a perfect replica of ordinary vision. And one might go on to say that if perspective does not replicate ordinary vision, then not only is it not what it pretends to be, but it is not accurate; it is only a (culturally) arbitrary picturing of the world. But I am not convinced that a case can not be made for perspective's accuracy over and above its cultural rootedness. Nor am I persuaded that, given the purposes of perspective, it can be regarded as arbitrary.

In order to defend the accuracy of perspective, we must clarify that about which perspective is supposed to be accurate. If we say that a perspectival picture, in order to be accurate, must afford a perfect replica of normal vision, then perspective is not accurate. But the question is whether this is the right requirement for accuracy. Of course, contemporary film theorists can find theoreticians and polemicists who will make claims that perspective replicates vision, but they may have been overly enthusiastic and, as a result, they may have missed the particular grounds upon which claims that perspective can, in fact, make to nonarbitrary, non-culturally determined accuracy can be based.

When I say that a perspective picture of a scene in nature is accurate, I do not mean that it is a perfect replica of anything, including human vision. Rather, I mean that it provides accurate information about certain aspects of the appearance of the natural scene. Of course, the information perspective drawings excel in providing concerns the appearance of the relative positions of things in space and the distances between them. No other system of pictorial representation is as good at giving this kind of information as is the perspective system. Other systems, like the ancient Egyptian, had other purposes than the perspective system does. But it cannot be denied that for the purposes of pictorially projecting the placement of things in space, informatively, the perspective system is superior—that is, contains more accurate information—than does the Egyptian system. In fact, the perspective system is more accurate, transculturally, in terms of affording certain spatial information than any other mimetic pictorial system.

Two points in the preceding argument need to be extended. First, there is a difference between the claim that a system provides a perfect replica of the world, or of vision, and the claim that it provides an accurate representation. For *accuracy* is a matter of *degree*. My claim is that in a nonconven-

tionalist sense, perspective, transculturally considered, is the most accurate mimetic pictorial system of representation. Some dismiss such claims by saying that perspective is not "true." But I am not claiming that it is "true," a term of assessment which I, by the way, think is more aptly applied to propositions than to pictures. So rather than claiming that perspective is "true," I claim it is accurate. But how do we measure accuracy across representational systems? We can not, unless we stipulate the meaning of accuracy in respect to some specific dimension.

This leads to my second point: when I claim accuracy for perspective, I am saying that no competing, mimetic representational system is as accurate as perspective in rendering information about the appearances of the relative disposition of objects in space. This, it seems to me, is incontestable. Furthermore, perspective accomplishes this because it has been grounded in the laws of vision. No other system of representation is based on scientific laws in this way. And the laws from which perspective derive are in no sense conventional, arbitrary, or adopted by fiat. They are laws. This is the source of what gives the system the accuracy it has in recreating the spatial appearance of the world. Moreover, the laws of the scientific theories in question were not adopted as a result of a social compact or decision, in the way of codes and conventions; they were discovered.

The skeptic, considering the preceding argument, will believe that he has located a slip up. For to make my argument, I must *stipulate* that the relevant sense of accuracy is accuracy in respect to the disposition of objects in space. This is correct, but it does not cut against my argument since it is a conditional one—if we want pictorial accuracy or fidelity about the appearance of the disposition of objects in space, then perspectival systems of picturing are best suited to the purpose, no matter what culture you hail from. Of course, I admit that we may not be especially concerned with this kind of accuracy, but this is beside the point. If we want to saw through metal, then we do best to use a hack saw; if we want accurate spatial information about the appearance of the layout of the world from our pictures, then we use perspective. In neither case are we playing by the rules of society. We are adapting to the structure of the world, including that of human biology.

Of course, it is true that there are many different types of representational systems. And many of these systems are not devoted to giving accurate information about the way the world appears—for example, abstract expressionism. These nonmimetic, nonperspectival systems may interest us—especially from an aesthetic point of view—because they have features, qualities, and purposes besides those of delivering accurate spatial appearances. And for purposes other than delivering accurate spatial informa-

tion, these other systems may be *more* desirable than and superior to perspective systems of the sort developed in the Renaissance. But if one is committed to pictorial fidelity in respect to spatial appearance, then perspective, as a result of its scientific origins, is the best means to that end.

We may make our point in a related but slightly different way by drawing a distinction between the genus, representational systems, and the species, mimetic pictorial systems. Representational systems include practices that refer to the world but which do not do so in such a way that percipients are able to recognize the referents of the pictures without any special training. Mimetic, pictorial representations, or pictures, for short, are symbols whose referents can be recognized, in the picture, by viewers who have not been trained in any special method of "reading" pictures. Some explain this phenomena in terms of resemblance relations between the picture and its referents, while others speak of the sharing of invariant perceptual cues. Which explanation is superior is not germane to our discussion at this point. What is key is that perspective pictures are a subclass of pictorial representation.

Now there are undeniably many types of visual representations, such as American stop signs, that do not involve pictorial recognition. And the existence in a culture's representational system of representations that work by way of pictorial recognition may be the result of a social contract. But the fact that there exist nonmimetic representational practices does not tell against the accuracy of perspective; it only shows there can be representational systems for which the kind of accuracy perspective excels in is irrelevant.

Moreover, there are pictorial practices—such as the Japanese floating-eye style, the ancient Egyptian frontal-eye style, and what Deregowski calls split-type drawings[28]—which do not afford the degree of spatial accuracy involved in Western perspectival picturing. But, of course, this may only indicate that spatial accuracy may not be the central concern of every pictorial mode of representation. However, we still may compare these various pictorial practices in terms of spatial accuracy. And when we raise the question of spatial accuracy—which is a question of a specific variety of accuracy—in the context of pictorial systems we observe that the subset of pictures that employ Western perspective are the most spatially accurate ones.

Is the preceding claim just an example of the imperialistic hauteur of the West, as many contemporary film theorists might argue? No. In the early eighteenth century, the Japanese taught themselves the Western perspective system by comparing the perspective illustrations of Dutch scientific books to their own illustrations, and they judged the Dutch illustration to

be more "lifelike" (which I would interpret as more accurate for the purpose of spatial mimesis). This resulted in the genre of Uki-e, or "relief pictures," pictures of three-dimensional effect, using perspective and shading, made by such masters as Hokusai, Kunizoshi, and Hiroshige, among others, and easily marketed.[29]

If we are attempting to debate about whether perspective is the aesthetically best pictorial system, it might make sense to argue that perspective systems and alternative methods of picturing, like the floating-eye style, are somewhat incommensurable because they are subtended by different central purposes. Certainly paintings with "floating points of view" can be aesthetically superior to perspective paintings, and vice versa; it may become difficult to weigh the comparative value of a masterpiece in the perspective style with a masterpiece of the floating point of view style. We can make the prosaic observation, nevertheless, that, all things being equal, the perspective painting will give us more information about spatial appearances than will the picture with the floating point of view. This is the sense in which perspective can be said to be "true" to the world, though it is better to express this by saying that it has the highest available pictorial fidelity. Of course, saying the perspective system has the highest degree of accuracy does not entail that it may not involve some inaccuracies. It only claims that perspective is the most accurate pictorial means of rendering information about spatial appearance. These observations about the accuracy of perspective count against not only the idea that perspective involves deceptive illusion, but also against the notion that perspective is a code, for codes are by definition arbitrary. But "if you want your picture to convey information about the relative locations, sizes, and dimensions of objects in a measurable space as seen from one spot, then scientific perspective is not as arbitrary as other systems."[30]

When I have previously defended perspective's relative superiority vis-à-vis spatial accuracy, critics have cited maps as counter-examples to my hypothesis insofar as maps may be more accurate about spatial layouts than perspectival pictures.[31] But clearly maps are not suitable counter-examples. For I claim that perspective is more accurate in terms of affording spatial information than any other mimetic *pictorial* system. And maps are not pictures. One must be taught to read a map; the mountains on a map are not recognized perceptually as mountains but are coded, often by color. Maps are read, not recognized.

Another complaint about my formulation is that by speaking of appearances in my account of perspective, I have inadvertently stumbled into relying on the notion of "illusion," thereby contradicting myself, given my objections to correlating perspective and illusion.[32] However, critics over-

look the crucial fact that the word "appearance" need not mean "illusion," nor is the "illusion" sense of "appearance" being used in the preceding formulations. When a police officer questions witnesses about the appearance of a bank robber, the last thing she wants is a report of an illusion. Except for certain contexts, such as Platonic dialogues, where the operative dichotomy is Appearance versus Reality, an appearance is the outward aspect of any physical thing. There is no reason to suspect that in ordinary language "The milk appears spoiled" means "The milk is not spoiled but deceives us into thinking it is." That is, talk about appearances can be talk about how things are, not about illusions.

Nor need talk of appearances refer to a particular instance of vision, but may refer to what is visible. That is, a perspective picture described as affording spatial information about appearances is not being characterized as providing a phenomenological replica of a specific act or kind of act of vision but as providing information about the structure of ambient light in an optic array which, in turn, is the sort of thing from which humans derive reliable information about the layout of things in space. I use the word "appearance" to signal that the spatial information in perspective pictures is visual. But my commitment to perspective as affording information about the structure of light in optical arrays hardly commits me to the belief that perspective is a point perfect replica of the experience of normal seeing. It is not a representation of seeing; it affords spatial information from the optical structure—from the appearance—of the layout of the environment. Moreover, the information afforded by perspective is *more accurate* than that available from any competing, mimetic pictorial system.

Contemporary film theorists move from the notion that Renaissance perspective is an arbitrary code or convention[33] to the attribution of similar coding to the cinematic image as such. This is doubly wrong—wrong not simply because perspective is regarded as a code or a convention, but also because not every cinematic image is governed by perspective. Consider soft focus shots without vanishing points and the capacity of such things as telephoto lenses to violate perspective laws.[34]

Reigning doxy has it not only that perspective is a code or convention, but that it functions in cinema as an instrument for *positioning* subjects in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense of *subject*. Recall Heath's contention that "perspective-system images bind the spectator in place, the suturing central position that is the sense of the image, that sets its scene (in place, the spectator *completes* the image as its subject.)"

We can give Heath's first use of "in place" some literal sense. Namely, a perspectival image has an optimal station point, a place in space. The place, that is, is the implied physical vantage point of the perspectival image. In

fact, when viewing a movie, few of us ever occupy this precise station point. Yet the image may be said to have this point, even if our inhabiting it is rarely germane to our still deriving accurate spatial information from the image (I can be sitting far off center in a side aisle and still know that Humongus is about three feet ***behind*** his next victim). Heath would have it that the perspective system somehow enjoins us to believe that we are at the monocular station point of the perspectival image—that we identify our position, wherever we are in the theater, with the location of the camera lens in relation to the profilmic visual array. We are thus seduced into believing that we have a certain position in relation to the film, a unitary place in the center of the action. This sense of "in place" leads to another—the Althusserian-Lacanian sense of "in place" in the above quotation. Identifying with the visual center of the action causes a sense of psychological subject unity—the illusion of the "self" as a single, unitary, placed, centrally positioned center of experience—which presumably, in turn, heightens the illusion of the image ("completes" it). That is, Heath maintains a connection between the centrality of perspective's physically locatable station point and the centered position of the subject/spectator as coherent and stable. And this type of subject positioning is, in turn, seen to be a key ideological effect, creating subject supports upon which capitalism can drape its sundry roles.

In the previous chapter we have already had cause to question whether the abstract subject supports believed to be created by the aforesaid type of positioning really supply any clue to the formation of the kinds of personalities and economic role players required by capitalist society. Also, in our discussion of Metz, we began to review some of the difficulties involved in maintaining that spectators identify with the camera. If spectators did identify with the position of the camera, they could only do this by ignoring a great deal of visual information which the human organism has at its disposal (if only subliminally). For example, cameras do not "see around corners." So when I watch a film from the extreme left side of the theater, I will not see the same thing that I would see if I occupied the same seating arrangement in relation to the profilmic event. This does not prevent me from getting accurate information about spatial appearances from the screen, for, if I know about cameras, I know the disposition of objects is relative to the lens and not to my seat. But if Heath wants to claim identification with the camera he must explain how the organism represses all the available spatial cues at its disposal.

Heath attempts to do this through reference to an unconscious mechanism that is especially responsive to perspective. In order to assess Heath's explanation we must scrutinize the supposed internal workings of this

unconscious mechanism. Heath describes perspective in terms of a central position, a unified place. Words like *central, position, unified* are key words in the Althusserian-Lacanian psychology. They are words used to describe subject construction. Indeed, subject construction, in the conceptual framework of contemporary film theory, is synonymous with subject positioning and subject unity. Thus, the explanation we are being offered of the spectator's identification with the camera appears to be that given the central (single, unified) position (place) of the station point in perspective, the spectator is lured (and deceived or trapped) into identifying with the camera lens (and, presumably, filtering out all the available, contrary spatial cues) because the structure of perspective reinforces the illusion of subject unity (in the psychological-ideological sense) and, putatively, because spectators are prone to accept reinforcements of the illusion of subject unity above countervailing cognitive and perceptual stimuli. Is this a persuasive explanation?

If we agree that there is a literal sense in which perspective involves a position, then the sense in which it "positions spectators" is nonliteral; it does not, for example, move them around the theater. Furthermore, the sense in which spectators are positioned as subject unities is also not literal, but rather is an explanatory metaphor, one that pertains to a conception of the self without any reference to actual points in space. But what do these different phases of the identification have to do with each other besides the fact that they are described by a similar vocabulary?[35] Perspective does not require that we be positioned at the literal monocular station point of the image in order to work effectively as a mimetic, pictorial representation, so it does not literally position us—though it may metaphorically position us in the sense of establishing the orientation of the action. But even if perspective did somehow literally dictate a central position, how would that cause the belief that each of us is a unitary subject? After all, the idea that we are the (nonspatial) centers of our experience is another metaphor.

How do we or our psyches parlay a (doubtful) spatial position of centrality into a belief about the centrality of the subject? The latter is a very different phenomenon from the former, even if it is described in similar words. The Althusserian-Lacanian position does maintain that visual stimuli have an especially powerful role in the formation of identity. Nevertheless, the equivocation on the word *center* in Heath's account cannot be bolstered by a simple allusion to the mirror stage since literal, physical centering is not a necessary component of that phenomenon—couldn't a child be standing at the left corner of her looking glass? Rather it seems that Heath will have to postulate an etymologically playful psychic mechanism

that moves from perspective's station point to subject unity along a series of puns.

That, in and of itself, is not, in principle, an insurmountable problem, since it has been established that the unconscious is fond of literalization and verbal images. The problem is more specifically whether Heath can postulate unconscious receptivity to the puns he relies on in his explanation—*position,* for example. That is, either the receptivity to such puns is part of the psychic mechanism or it is an equivocation on the part of Heath's attempted explanation. The former, without further argumentation, appears unlikely, especially when one recalls that certain of Heath's subject unity metaphors are not common parlance, but esoteric jargon of a very recent, marginal school of psychoanalysis. Are we to believe the unconscious knew these puns as *as early as* the Quattrocento? Also, are we to believe that the normal viewer unconsciously knows the rhetoric of the theory of perspective? On the other hand, a weakness for equivocation saturates contemporary film theory and, thus, it seems likely that it is in operation in this explanation too.

Earlier we learned that perspective is supposedly complicit in the ideology of the visible. A major difficulty in assessing this accusation is knowing what in the world the "ideology of the visible" comprises. If it reduces to the production of positioned *(centered)* subjects, then it is liable to the foregoing objections as well as the objections made in the preceding chapter. But perhaps the ideology of the visible involves more than subject positioning (and centering). For example, it is often noted that much modern epistemology is rooted in questions of visual perception and employs primarily visual metaphors for knowledge. Maybe this feature of Western philosophy is the locus of or at least a part of the ideology of the visible. However, if this conjecture of mine is correct, two points should be made here. First, though epistemology is obsessively concerned with vision and visual metaphors, perhaps to its own detriment, perspective is not a central metaphor in its discussions, nor does perspective figure in the major debates in the philosophy of perception. Thus, it would seem off the mark to regard perspective as a major contributor to the ideology of the visible if that ideology is identified with the place of perception in epistemology. Second, if philosophy's emphasis on visual perception is really the culprit here, one wants to know why its possibly skewed research program is ideological? In what system of social domination does it participate?

In our quotation from Comolli we were told that the camera reinforces a code which "placed the human eye at the center of the system of representation, thereby excluding other systems and assuring the domination of the

eye over the other organs of senses." Does this mean that the relevant form of domination in the ideology of the visible is that of the eye over the other senses and that any representational system that "privileges" sight, as perspective does, is ideologically complicit? This is a strange sense of ideological domination. I find it hard to think of my eyes as subjugating my nose. Human visual capacities are more highly developed than our other senses, but it is difficult to see the way in which that fact plays a significant role in any system of social domination. Nor does it seem appropriate to think of the fact that we rely so heavily on vision as a matter of privileging it. Do we think bats privilege the sonic or that they foster an ideology of the sonic? Would bat art be complicit in the ideology of the sonic? And who would be the oppressed in this ideological arrangement?

Last, perspective is said to naturalize the ideologically charged images it organizes by passing itself off as something other than the code or convention it really is. We have explored reasons for disputing part of this assertion in our denial that perspective is code. But apart from the issue of whether or not perspective is a code, it is still possible that it performs some naturalizing magic on its images. However, the argument against this hypothesis would be of a piece with our arguments against illusionism's purported naturalizing effect. That an image is perspectivally organized in no way enhances the credibility of its ideological message. This can be seen quite easily by considering advertisements. If you don't believe that drinking wine cooler will make you a zesty, fun-loving, beach bum, then a perspectively shot ad will not, in virtue of its perspective, convince you.

Indeed, there is another way in which ads show that the contemporary approach to perspective is misguided. If ads are thought of as effective disseminators of ideology, then it cannot be their use of perspective that accounts for their success. For many ads are not perspectival. Many, for example, are photomontages, full of virtually cubist spatial contortions. These ads seem as successful as perspectival ads. Therefore, the presence or absence of perspective in ads seems irrelevant to their ideological effect.

AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF THE CINEMATIC IMAGE

In this chapter we have been concerned with the cinematic image, which we have thought of as the image projected by a single shot—a close-up of a hero's face, or a long-view of Castle Dracula. We have been highly critical of the approach to the cinematic image of contemporary theorists. But do we have an alternative account and can that alternative account tell us anything that is theoretically informative? Thus, I shall attempt to sketch an alterna-

tive account and to show that this alternative account can serve as part of an answer to a question that contemporary theorists have about movies. Contemporary theorists, it seems to me, are often motivated by the question of why *movies*—the commercial entertainment films of Hollywood International—are so powerful, that is, so popular cross-culturally as well as across the boundaries of race, gender, and class. The following account of the cinematic image provides an inroad into answering that question.

Cinematic images, in their standard use in movies, are, for the most part, representational, but, more important, they are *pictorial* representations. They refer to their referents by way of *picturing* them. This process of picturing has been explained in various ways. Some hold that pictures refer by displaying or manifesting a delimited range of resemblance to their referents; or some prefer to say that pictures operate by displaying certain of the same perceptually invariant cues as their referents do. Which of these psychological theories, if they are ultimately competing theories, is stronger is not my present concern. For whether by means of similarities or shared cues, pictorial representations are the sort of representations whose referents—whether the picture depicts a man, a horse, or a house—the spectator recognizes simply by looking.

Given that the typical movie image is a pictorial representation, what has this to do with the popularity of movies i.e., with their accessibility across nations, creeds, races, and classes? Well, a picture is a very special sort of symbol. Psychological evidence strongly supports the contention that we learn to recognize what a picture stands for as soon as we have become able to recognize the objects, or kinds of objects, that serve as the models for that picture. Picture recognition is not a skill acquired over and above object recognition. Whatever features or cues we come to employ in object recognition, we also mobilize to recognize what pictures depict. A child raised without pictorial representations will, after being shown a couple of pictures, be able to identify the referent of any standard picture of a kind of object with which he or she is familiar.[36] The rapid development of this picture-recognition capacity contrasts strongly with the acquisition of a symbol system such as language. Upon mastering a couple of words, the child is nowhere near mastering the entire language. Similarly, when an adult is exposed to one or two representational *pictures* in an alien pictorial idiom, say a Westerner confronting a Japanese image in the floating-eye style, she will be able to identify the referent of any picture in that format after studying one or two representations of that sort for a few moments. But no Westerner, upon learning one or two linguistic symbols of the Japanese language, could go on to identify the reference of all, or even

merely a few more, Japanese words. Moreover, as we have already seen, the Japanese were eminently able to catch on to and replicate the Western system of perspectival picturing by examining a selection of book illustrations; but they could never have acquired any European language by learning the meanings of just a few words or phrases.

Pictorial representation thus differs radically from linguistic representations. The speed with which the former is mastered suggests that it does not require special learning, above the realization, perhaps, that flat surfaces are being used to stand for three-dimensional objects. Rather, the capacity to recognize what a picture depicts emerges in tandem with the capacity to recognize the kind of object that serves as the model of the picture. The reciprocal relation between picture recognition and object recognition, of course, explains how it is possible for us, having acquired detailed visual information from pictures, to recognize objects and places we have never encountered in real life. And, of course, the fact that pictorial recognition does not require any special learning process would also explain how movies, whose basic constituent symbols are pictures, are immediately accessible to ***untutored*** audiences in every corner of the world. These audiences do not need any special training to deal with the basic images in movies, for the capacity to recognize what these images are about has evolved part and parcel with the viewer's capacity to recognize objects and events.

The technology of film could be adapted in such a way that the basic images of a film genre or film style were not pictorial representations. One could imagine a motion picture industry of changing abstract forms, after the fashion of Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21*, or one of spectacles of color, such as Stan Brakhage's *Text of Light*. But that was not the road taken by the movies. Movies became a global phenomenon—and a lucrative industry—precisely because in their exploitation of pictorial recognition—as opposed to symbol systems that require mastery of processes such as reading, decoding, or deciphering in order to be understood—they rely on a biological capability that is nurtured in humans as they learn to identify the objects and events in their environment.

The basic images in movies are not simply pictorial representations; they are, standardly, ***moving*** pictorial representations. But just as an audience need not go through a process of learning to "read" pictures, neither is its perception of movie "movement" learned. Rather, it is a function of the way stroboscopic or beta phenomena affect the brain's organization of congruous input presented in specifiable sequences to different points on the retina. Of course, following a movie involves much more than the

capacity to recognize what its moving images represent. But we should not overlook the crucial role that the relative ease of comprehending the basic symbols of movies plays in making movies readily accessible.

My remarks thus far are apt to displease the majority of contemporary film theorists. For the contention that pictures (and, by extension, motion pictures) work by enabling their referents to be recognized in virtue of the way in which our perceptual system is keyed, goes against contemporary received wisdom that pictures, like any other symbol system, are matters of codes and conventions. Undoubtedly, some contemporary theorists will recall an anthropology class in which he was told that certain non-Western peoples were unable to understand pictures shown to them by missionaries and other field workers. However, the evidence here has never been entirely decisive. Complaints about the fidelity of the photographs involved have been raised, along with the more serious objection that what the subjects failed to understand, and then only initially, was the practice of using flat surfaces to portray three-dimensional objects.[37] Once they got the hang of that, they had no trouble in recognizing what hitherto unseen pictures referred to—assuming they were familiar with the kinds of objects displayed in the pictures.[38] And Margaret Hagen writes:

> There is no reliable evidence that pictorially naive people are incapable of either perceiving or drawing pictures of isolated *objects*. For the perception of *spatial layouts* in pictures the findings are less consistent and subject to some heated debate. It is safe to conclude that it often takes a short period of time for the pictorially naive to learn to attend to the depicted contents rather than to the medium (paper, canvas, whatever), and the accuracy and flexibility of their pictorial spatial perceptions are often limited in apparently surprising but understandable ways. What is important is that complete failure of spatial perception in pictures by the naive is almost unknown in the literature. Unless one wishes to argue that a completely arbitrary code of depiction can be acquired, learned, and understood in a truly astonishingly short period of time, then the hypothesis that pictures function as representations without a basis in resemblance is untenable.[39]

Also, on the non-conventionalist side of the scale, we must weigh the psychological evidence of the child's acquisition of pictorial practices, and the zoological evidence that certain animals have the capacity for pictorial recognition,[40] against exotic anecdotes that are meant to demonstrate that the practices of picturing are cultural conventions that must be learned in the fashion of language acquisition. For when would children have time to enter our pictorial convenants, and how could animals?

Moreover, we can consider our own cases. We all recall our own lan-

guage acquisition and we know how to go about helping youngsters to learn to speak and to read. But who remembers undergoing a similar process in regard to pictures, and what techniques would we employ to teach a youngster "pictorial literacy"? Yes, we may show a child a few pictures, and then say the name of the object portrayed and point to parts of the object. But very shortly the child just sees what the picture is of; the child does not "read" the picture or decode it or go through some process of inference. And from a meager set of examples, the child can proceed to identify the subjects of a plethora of pictures, because there is a continuum between apprehending pictorial representations and perceiving the world that does not depend upon learning anything like the conventional, arbitrary correlations of a vocabulary, or the combinatory principles of a grammar.

There is undoubtedly a temptation to think that picture recognition involves some process of decoding or inference because of the contemporary influence of the computational metaphor of the mind. We think that computers supply us with powerful insight into how the mind works. And if we were to build a computer to simulate pictorial recognition, it would require a complex information-processing system. But it does not follow that if computers employ complex information-processing systems in pictorial recognition, then humans must likewise possess such systems. It may rather be that our neurophysiology is so constructed that when stimulated by certain pictorial arrays, we see what the picture is of. John Searle notes that balance is controlled by the fluids of our inner ear. Were we to construct a robot, balance would probably be governed by some complex computational program. But, for us, balance is a matter governed by our fleshy hardware.[41] A similar case *might* be made that biology—rather than information processing—may have a great deal to tell us about the workings of object recognition and picture recognition. And to the extent that pictorial representation is a matter of the way in which humans are made, a practice rooted in pictorial representation—such as the movies—will be widely and easily accessible to all humans made that way.[42]

Many contemporary film theorists, due to their inclinations toward semiotics, resist approaching pictorial representation in the movies in the preceding fashion. Their resistance rests on a confusion, or rather a conflation, on their part of the ideas of code, convention, and culture. In film studies these terms are treated as if they were equivalent. If something is coded or conventional, then it is regarded as a cultural production. This seems fair enough. But it is more problematic to presume, as film theorists do, the inverse; that if something is a cultural product, then it is an example

of coded or conventional phenomena. Thus, if pictorial representations, including moving pictorial representations, are cultural productions, which they certainly are, then they must be conventional. The difficulty here lies in the assumption that everything that is cultural is necessarily conventional.

Consider plows. They are cultural productions. They were produced by certain agricultural civilizations that had culturally specific needs not shared, for example, by hunter-gatherers. Is the design of a plow a matter of convention? Recall, here, that for semiotically influenced film theorists, arbitrariness is a key defining feature of a convention. That is, a group creates a convention—like the color of a police cruiser—when there are a number of alternative ways of dealing with a choice situation, ***and*** where the decision between these alternatives is a matter of indifference—i.e., each of the alternatives is equally satisfactory. The choice between these alternatives is arbitrary and is reached by fiat. But the adoption of the design of the plow could not have been reached by fiat. The plow had a purpose—digging furrows—and its effectiveness depended on its being accommodated to the structure of nature. It would have to be heavy enough and sharp enough to cut into the earth, and it had to be adapted to the capacities of its human users—it had to be steerable and pullable by creatures like us with two arms and limited strength. A device such as a plow had to be discovered; it could not be brought into existence by consensus. We could not have elected pogo sticks to do the work of plows. The plow was a cultural *in*vention, not a cultural *con*vention. It was adopted because it worked, because it met a cultural need by accommodating features of nature and biology.

The point of introducing the concept of a ***cultural invention*** here is, of course, to block the facile identification of the cultural and the conventional. Applied to the sort of pictorial representations found in movies, this concept suggests that pictorial representations may be cultural inventions, inventions that, given the way people are built, cause spectators who are untrained in any system of conventions to recognize what pictures stand for. The structure of such images is not determinable by mere decision. Given the constraints of the human perceptual apparatus, we cannot decree that anything is ***recognizable*** as anything else, though we may decree that anything can stand for anything else. It seems cogent to suppose that this limitation is in large measure attributable to human biology. And insofar as movies are constituted of a mode of representation connected to biological features of the human organism, they will be generally more accessible than genres in other media, such as the novel, that presuppose the mastery of learned conventions such as specific natural languages. Also, if the recogni-

tion of movie images is more analogous to a reflex process than it is to a process like reading, then following a movie may turn out to be less taxing, less a matter of active effort, than reading. Perhaps this can be confirmed by recalling how much easier it is to follow a movie when one is fatigued than it is to read a novel in the same condition.

The claim has so far been advanced that *one* crucial factor in the popularity of movies is the fact that movies usually rely, in terms of their basic imagery, on pictorial representations that allow masses of untutored spectators easy access to the fundamental symbols in the system, due to the way humans are constructed. But is this not just a reversion to the kind of realist explanation we dismissed earlier? Not at all. The Bazinian claims the spectator somehow regards the film image to be identical with its referent, while contemporary film theorists hold that the typical cinematic image imparts the illusion of reality, of transparency, or of naturalness. My contention, though, has not invoked any of these realist, psychological effects, nor anything like them. It has instead claimed that the untutored spectator recognizes what the film image represents without reference to a code; I have not claimed that the spectator takes the pictorial representation to be, in any sense, its referent. Human perceptual capacities evolve in such a way that the capacity for pictorial recognition comes, almost naturally, with the capacity for object recognition, and part of that capacity is the ability to differentiate pictures from their referents. Thus, we are not talking about a realist, psychological effect—the taking of a representation for its referent—but only about the capacity of movies to exploit generic, recognitional abilities. Another way to see the difference between this approach and that of the realists is to note how often in the realists' account of the effect of movies they emphasize the importance of the fact that movies are photographic, whereas in the account offered here, the important technology for explaining the effect of the image is the non-cinema-specific technology of pictorial representation.

I have characterized the cinematic image as a type of pictorial representation. Pictorial representations, in turn, are those whose referents are recognized by untutored spectators simply by looking; that is, they are recognized by spectators who have not been trained in some process of reading or decoding, nor do they identify the referents by inference. When a viewer looks at a picture, the viewer recognizes the ***kind*** of object the picture depicts—a tree, a gun, a dog—where the viewer is already familiar with the kind of object depicted. The viewer can also recognize particulars portrayed in pictures, where the viewer is knowledgeable of the particular. For example, I can recognize the referent, George's house, in the picture, if I am

already acquainted with George's house. The viewer, of course, may also be told what the unfamiliar particular portrayed in the picture is—the space shuttle or the Jolly Green Giant—and then go on to recognize it in successive pictures. This capacity for pictorial recognition, moreover, it seems must be at least partly explicable in terms of the structure of the human perceptual apparatus.

Some contemporary film theorists may object to my presentation of the preceding theory as a contrast to their own. For some theorists, as we have noted, regard the cinematic image as iconic, as having a motivated relation of resemblance to the referent. However, they still regard iconic symbols as coded or conventional, and as basically explicable in terms of culture. The preceding theory, however, not only remains neutral on the issue of resemblance (though I am not entirely unsympathetic to it) but also stresses that cinematic images are cultural inventions, not conventions, and that considerations of the structure of the perceptual apparatus are germane to an account of pictorial representations in general and cinematic images in particular. (In terms of the previous section on perspective, it should be recalled that we classified perspective pictures as a subcategory of pictures).

Another charge that contemporary film theorists will level at my theory is that it reduces pictorial representation to biology and therefore denies it a history. This is a red herring. The preceding account does not deny that there are many forms of pictorial representation and that pictorial representation in a given culture can undergo development. One can profitably investigate the variety and vicissitudes of pictorial representation. We have only claimed that reference to the biological structure of the human perceptual apparatus has some important role in the account of pictorial representation and the cinematic image. Furthermore, I think that contemporary film theorists have failed to acknowledge this. The preceding theory is a corrective, then, but it does not preclude historical studies of pictorial representation.

It is also true that I think the calling to mind of the role biology plays in the communication of the cinematic image can, additionally, serve an explanatory role. For if one wants to know how it is possible for movies to be so popular to audiences of different cultural backgrounds, political and religious affiliations, and class interests, then we should look to features of movies that address the mass movie audience in terms of what those audiences have *in common*. That is, we expect that if movies can engage peoples of widely different cultural backgrounds successfully, then it is plausible to suppose that movies are connected to fairly generic features of human organisms. And identifying pictorial recognition, conceived as

partly a biological capacity, as *one* lever of the movie's popularity, certainly connects movies with a fairly generic feature of human organisms. This undoubtedly does not account for why specific movies or specific types of movies are popular with target audiences. But it does offer the start of a theoretical account of the mass appeal of movies (to be expanded in ensuing chapters).

One theoretical bonus, then, of our account of the cinematic image is that it suggests part of an answer to the question of why the motion pictures called movies, in which category I would include commercial, fictional TV, are so popular, i.e., such a dominant mass art form. Thus, this account offers an explanation of something that I think contemporary film theorists, such as Metz, want explained. Moreover, it does this without resorting to psychoanalysis, and, indeed, if it is compelling, it shows that psychoanalysis, at the level of the cinematic image is beside the point, for we can explain the mass appeal of the cinematic image in cognitive terms.

At the same time, however, I will be undoubtedly reminded that this account does not offer anything by way of an explanation of the manner in which the cinematic image as such participates in the dissemination of ideology, an issue of perhaps highest concern to contemporary film theorists. In response, I must repeat that I am not convinced that the cinematic image as such has any ideological effect; pictures, cinematic or otherwise, may or may not be ideological depending on their internal and contextual articulation. This is not to deny that movies and cinematic images cannot be vehicles of ideology, but only that pictures as such are not ideological. We will have to look at each image[43] and each film individually in order to determine its ideological content and not to the facts of cinematic representation itself.

Theoretically, the contemporary film theorist can claim to have a more elegant explanatory framework than mine. The contemporary theorist can explain *both* the popular allure of the cinematic image and its ideological effects by means of the same set of reigning concepts, whereas my approach is messier, explaining the mass appeal of movies with one set of concepts and the ideological effects of given films ad seriatim. This is not entirely correct, since I think we can make various generalizations about the operation of ideology in film, but it is true that the contemporary film theorist's approach is more of a unified theory than mine. However, since I think that the very notion that the cinematic image per se has an ideological effect grievously mistaken, I prefer accuracy to elegance.

4.

NARRATION

CONTEMPORARY film theorists appear to hold that representation is inherently ideological, i.e., possessed of some politically discreditable effect independently of what is represented. Narration is a form of representation insofar as a narrative describes, and in that sense represents, a sequence of events, generally human events. And, of course, film, in its most salient use in our culture, is narrative. Thus, in this chapter, we shall explore the case of contemporary film theory versus narrative.

Though undoubtedly there are some contemporary film theorists, like Peter Gidal, who are opposed to narrative in general, the target of many contemporary film theorists seems somewhat more narrowly, if obscurely, circumscribed. They lodge their criticisms most frequently against something called "realism," or "classic realism," or "the classic realist text," where a film is also considered a "text." In regard to cinema, "classic realism" generally involves at least the use of narration in coordination with what are thought of as visual codes of verisimilitude.

As the term classic realism implies, it is applicable across media. Its corpus includes things like objective (rather than nonobjective) photos, traditionally plotted novels and plays, paintings proposing a purported relation of similitude to their referents, TV soap operas and police shows, advertisements for Calvin Klein underwear, Hollywood films like *Death Wish* and *Sixteen Candles,* Neo-realist films like *Bicycle Thief,* a piece of Soviet Realism like *The General Line* or of deep-focus realism like *Magnificent Ambersons.*

Classic realism does not simply refer to a particular art movement such as

the one associated with Courbet, though Courbet is a classic realist. Nor is realism simply Naturalism: *The Golem*, *Warning Shadows*, and *The Bandwagon* are just as much a matter of realism in this sense as is *Greed*.

Rather, it would seem that "classic realism" is to be contrasted, in visual media, with abstractionism, especially reflexive abstractionism, and/or with reflexive subversions of the so-called codes of verisimilitude. In temporal media, classic realism appears to be contrasted with the subversive structural ploys of the New Novel à la Robbe-Grillet and Duras, and, perhaps, the disjunctive intertextuality of someone like Kathy Acker.

As we shall see, contemporary theorists are not very helpful in defining "classic realism," forcing us, in the main, to rely on our ordinary intuitions about what we pre-theoretically consider to be realist representations when we read their assaults on the ideological effects of classic realism.

Roughly, I suppose, one can indicate the extension of the ruling concept of classic realism by means of some loose historical boundaries. Generally, classic realism comprises the practices of representation falling in line with the dominant artistic sensibility from the Renaissance to the advent of Modernism. In terms of film, classic realism involves at least the vast majority of fictional films made from around nineteen-thirteen or so until the crystallization of a Brechtian-Modernist cinema in the mid-sixties (with notable prefigurations such as *Man With A Movie Camera* and *Kuhle Wampe*) *as well as* fiction films after Godard et al. that continue in the pre-Brechtian-Modernist, that is to say classic realist, style. Moreover, though pictorial representation is a central ingredient in this style, narration is the component that, for contemporary theorists, is first among equals in the securing of the effect of classic realism.

In *Visible Fictions*, John Ellis attempts to clarify the operative notion of realism as it is applied to film by contemporary theorists. He believes that realist films are those that offer *probable* portrayals of characters and events where the probability in question has not to do with generalizations about actual behavior but with norms of what is plausible. This invocation of probability, of course, shows the high degree to which classic realism is bound up with narrative.

Second, Ellis holds, realist films aspire to a kind of surface accuracy in costume, setting, props, etc. And next, a realist film is said to approach an ideal of coherence "in the sense that events should always be seen as having explicable causes and being related to each other within the representation, rather than coming out of the blue."[1] Of course, this can result in divergences from Ellis' criterion of probability; that a newspaper reporter like Clark Kent can fly is hardly probable, but it is perfectly coherent given the

premises of *Superman*. Ellis is aware of this tension and writes: "This criterion (coherence) can be regarded as quite anti-realist by those who believe that 'realism' equals the attempt to portray things as they are or were. The demand that a representation should explain itself adequately to its audience cuts across the desire that it should show things 'as they were.'"[2]

Last, Ellis includes under the rubric of realism, films such as Rossellini's, that break with conventions in order to "get to a new sense of reality."[3] The kind of convention relevant here would include the requirement for explicability. Thus, Ellis lumps together what might be broadly thought of as Hollywood realism with its antipode, Neo-Realism, including radical endeavors in that form. This undoubtedly is disturbing for anyone who thinks that the former has no claim to the title realism, whereas the latter in subverting the former in the ways it does is a paradigm of realism.

Ellis is prepared for this charge, and acknowledges that he is characterizing different senses of realism; he says he is speaking of realisms. And yet, unaccountably, he goes on to hypothesize the essence of realism. He writes:

> In essence, realism is a regime of unified portrayal: every criterion of realism aims at the same objective, to combine all the elements of the representation at any point into a harmonious whole. This prevents the reading of the image, scanning it to see its different elements and their possible conflicts or combinations, which is a central feature of modernist tendencies in the other arts. (p. 9)

This characterization, however, is hardly adequate. It does not work on Ellis' own terms. Rossellini's *Paisan* is not harmonious in Ellis' sense, while *Rules of the Game* encourages scanning for conflicts and combinations of elements, thereby encouraging alternative interpretations. Also, this characterization, with its heavy emphasis on the "harmonious whole" (that is, on the criterion of coherence), suggests that visionary films such as Kenneth Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* are examples of realism.[4] Clearly this will not do. Ellis has not given us a viable criteria of realism, nor to my knowledge, has any other contemporary film theorist. However, Ellis has more or less earmarked or itemized what he and other contemporary film theorists have in mind when they speak of realism—viz., mainstream, narrative films, i.e., mass movie entertainments, and realist films (such as those of Soviet realism, deep-focus realism, Neo-Realism) that are not reflexive or not modernist. Moreover, it is the narrative element of these films that is especially central in imparting their "harmonizing effect," since it is narrative that unifies the portrayal of events over time. Thus, it is to

these films and their narrative structures which we now turn in order to explore the claim that realism is inherently ideological.

ENUNCIATION

Narration, according to contemporary film theorists, has ideological ramifications insofar as it contributes to the appearance of the harmonious wholeness of a film. This impression of harmonious wholeness, in turn, is ideologically suspect both for the ways in which it conspires in the production of unified subjects, in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense, and in the conjuring up of the politically dangerous naturalizing effect—i.e., the impressions that a film is a sample of reality narrating itself—a prospect whose dire consequences for contemporary theorists we discussed in the last chapter. A crucial feature of classical realist narration, in respect of its ideological effect, is that within this style, it is said that the narrative effaces all marks of enunciation. That is, by effacing the marks of enunciation, realist films, through their narrative form, induce impressions of harmonious wholeness which abet the production of Althusserian-Lacanian subject unities and/or the sense that the film is reality narrating itself. In order to get a handle on that of which realist films are here accused, some notion of enunciation and the relation of realist narration to enunciation is necessary.

Like the distinction between history and discourse, to which it can be correlated, the notion of enunciation comes from the linguist Benveniste. The notion of enunciation figures in the contrast that he draws between the speaking subject *(le sujet de l'énonciation)* and the subject of speech *(le sujet de l'énoncé)*.[5] Benveniste writes:

> *I* signifies "the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*." . . . *I* can only be identified by the instance of discourse that contains it and by that alone. It has no value except . . . in the act of speaking in which it is uttered. There is thus a combined double instance in this process: the instance of *I* as referent and the instance of the discourse containing *I* as the referee. The definition can now be stated precisely as: *I* is the individual who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*.[6]

In order to approach the contrast Benveniste has in mind, suppose that I say "I went to the store yesterday." The subject, "I," inside the quotation marks is the subject of speech *(le sujet de l'énoncé)*. The subject outside the quotes, the I speaking the sentence in the present tense—the *I say* . . .—

could be seen, heuristically, as the equivalent of the speaking subject *(le sujet de l'énonciation)*. Or, to be more precise in terms of what Benveniste is getting at, the simple utterance "I went to the store yesterday" really has two subjects, the "I" (the subject of speech; *le sujet de l'énoncé)* who went to the store, and the "I" that speaks the sentence (the speaking subject; *le sujet de l'énonciation)*. The realm of enunciation is the process of making the utterance which includes the speaking subject as well as the listener and the context of the utterance. The utterance itself comprises the *énoncé*. Clearly, every utterance will be enunciated, will herald from a speaking subject and some context of speech, but not every utterance will call attention to its process and context of enunciation and/or to its speaking subject.

The distinction between the *énoncé,* the utterance or specimen of speech, and the enunciation can be connected with the distinction, examined in the last chapter, between history and discourse. For some utterances manifest their enunciation, their speaking subject, e.g., "Tell *me* a story" or "*I* like Ike." Such utterances, as we have seen previously, are discourse. On the other hand, certain utterances do not show the fact of enunciation on their face; in the utterance "Something changes between 22 March and 28 December 1895," reference to the speaking subject is absent. The utterance is an example of the technical category of history in which the language is thought to be severed from a concrete communicative situation, the context of enunciation. Benveniste says of the historic mode that "there is in fact no longer even a narrator. The events are set forth as they occurred in the story. No one speaks here; the events seem to recount themselves."[7] And this, as we know, contemporary theorists regard as a prime means for the dissimulation of ideology for when a communication appears as reality narrating itself it fosters the belief that it is "true,"[8] no matter how distortive it actually is.

Though Benveniste himself did not develop the *énoncé/énonciation* and history/discourse distinctions at great length, they have been taken up by contemporary theorists of literature, painting, and film with vigor. However, contemporary theorists have often been very loose in expanding the application of Benveniste's categories, using them, for example, to categorize not only discrete utterances, as Benveniste does, but whole texts, and as a result they have derived very different conclusions from it—different from each other's as well as from what one might have predicted. Catherine Belsey sees as a mark of the classic realist text the effacement of enunciation, i.e., the text's own status as discourse, whereas Jenny Simonim-Grumbach thinks *all* fiction is communication in the historic mode.[9] And David Bordwell has pointed out that some contemporary literary theorists have

found ways to identify elements of discourse in texts that one might otherwise think were examples of the historic mode.[10]

As one might expect, matters become even more confused when one turns to film, since apart from dialogue and titles, such as intertitles, movies do not have the formal machinery of grammatical personhood necessary to make the distinctions between history and discourse and between the *énoncé* and the *énonciation*. Thus, some take the effacement of enunciation to be the mark of all realist film, while others find marks of enunciation in films which one would have thought consistent expansion of the distinction metaphorically would have categorized as belonging to the realm of the *énoncé*. For example, Hollywood camera movements that call attention to themselves are said to suddenly admit enunciation because they signal the presence of the author in the way grammatical self-reference in a sentence does.[11] This extension of the linguistic category of enunciation is both strained and far fetched as well as being quite remote from the purposes for which Benveniste introduced the concept as is Metz's notion that a film is in the historic mode if *it does not look at me* and discourse if *it looks at me*.[12]

Though it would be entertaining to trace the vagaries, linguistic contortions, and fanciful extrapolations by which contemporary film theorists have attempted to impose Benveniste's categories to film, the job has already been admirably done by David Bordwell and needs no repeating. Contemporary film theorists often use Benveniste's categories in ways that differ from both Benveniste and each other.[13] However, there are certain views of enunciation that are repeated often enough that they can be regarded as the majority opinion of the matter among contemporary film theorists and that bear criticism.[14]

Generally it is held that traditional films, such as mass movie entertainments, appear in the historic mode of narration since they efface all marks of enunciation. This appears to mean that such films do not internally represent the fact that they have an enunciator—an author, director, and so on. This gives them the attribute of appearing authorless which is one reason spectators are said to regard them as specimens of reality narrating itself. At the same time, the effacement of enunciation appears to involve the failure of the film to represent other contextual factors about the process of its production, such as the institution of cinema and the ideological determinants of its making. Indeed, sometimes it is said that the film effaces the fact that it is a production.

Of course, part of the context of enunciation is not only the speaking subject but also the receiver of the communication. In films in the historic mode of narration the lack of reference to enunciation somehow induces

the spectator to think of herself as the enunciator. So not only is reference to the viewing spectator suppressed, but the spectator supposedly misrecognizes herself as the enunciator. Traditional film, Metz writes, "Insofar as it abolishes all traces of the enunciation . . . succeeds in giving the spectator the impression that he is himself the subject."[15]

Contemporary film theorists see a welter of ideological effects issuing from this purported phenomenon. Seen as authorless, the film is taken for reality narrating itself, thereby imbuing what may be ideological with the aura of truth, transparency, and naturalness. As well, the film induces the spectator to regard herself as the enunciator, which, presumably, not only prompts her to accept the ideological falsehoods of the film as her own beliefs, but confirms the Althusserian-Lacanian sense of subject unity by placing her in the position of the "unified" enunciator of the spectacle. At the same time, the spectacle is not really unified or complete because all trace of the enunciation is *absent*. By identifying with the enunciation of the film, the spectator fills in the missing enunciator and thereby completes the film. This action of the Imaginary, in turn, is reinforced by the impression that the film is now whole, thereby further encouraging the ideologically false belief that the spectator is a unified subject. That is, the spectator by projecting herself via identification as the missing enunciator gives the film the illusion of being complete, whole, and harmonious, which illusion, in consequence, reconfirms the spectator's faith in being a unified subject, an effect which we have learned that Althusserian-Lacanians hold to be deeply ideological.

The problems with this cluster of hypotheses are legion, and we have encountered several of them already in our discussions of the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm and the notion of the transparency of the historic mode of narration. Though contemporary film theorists proceed as though they are straightforwardly applying well-founded distinctions of linguistic theory, it is neither clear that Benveniste's categories are well-founded, nor their application by film theorists straightforward. Of course, the question of the adequacy of Benveniste's linguistics is really an issue for experts in that field, nor need we detain ourselves over Benveniste's findings since film theorists have so changed their purport. Film theorists think that discourse masquerades as the historic mode of narration, a prospect unknown to Benveniste, nor does Benveniste seem to hint that I identify myself as the enunciator when I hear a third person utterance.

Of course, the wildest expansion upon Benveniste is the notion that his distinctions can be applied to film, which, as noted, has no system of personhood, save in virtue of its linguistic elements, like dialogue and

intertitles. But of course contemporary film theorists are not interested in applying the distinction to film dialogue—which would contain a lot of utterances that are discourse—but to the visual elements of film. In some cases, this involves personifying the film so that *it looks at me* or *it doesn't look at me* (Metz) in such a way that in the former case the film seems to be interpreted as saying "I'm here," and in the latter case, "It's here." (Or maybe "Nobody's here but these images—reality narrating itself again.") But this is just a bit of perfectly arbitrary word play that has nothing determinate to do with grammatical personhood. If I thought a film wasn't looking at me, couldn't I just as easily "translate" its address as "I'm not looking at you," which would not only be discourse, technically speaking, but would probably be true (of typical films, though maybe not interactive video). And, of course, if the film does give the visual impression that is somehow equivalent to "it doesn't watch *me*," then it is discourse in virtue of its first person reference. Of course, one might, as I do, think it theoretically advisable to forget about personifying the film and attempting to "translate" the pronominal reference of its purported utterances.[16] But that just might spell the end of the use of history, discourse, and enunciation by film theorists.

Of course, one reason to reject the notion that film images are describable in terms of person is that grammatical personhood is a system involving three types of indexes whereas there is no corresponding system in film. Stretching things so that point-of-view shots and subjective images (e.g., dream images) are called first person images and the rest third person, one is still left with the problem of identifying second person images as well as the problem that you have just stipulatively redefined the matter in such a way that traditional realist films can be discourse and can contain discourse insofar as they have point-of-view schemas and subjective images. Moreover, if you identify second person images as those that implicitly address the audience, all of the images in film will be second person. In order to remedy this you might say that the second-person images are only those in which the special assertiveness of the style refers to the presence of the audience, but then, of course, those are exactly the images that some theorists say bear traces of enunciation such that one might wish to categorize them as first person images.[17] Indeed, one might argue that every film image except maybe some shots into mirrors are third person. But, of course, the point here is not to argue about the person of this or that image but rather to indicate that there is no determinate way to lay the system of personhood on the cinematic image track and thus little theoretical profit or precision to be derived from attempting it.

Moreover, if we use the linguistic elements of traditional films—the dialogue and the intertitles—to determine the person of said films, then we will find first, second, and third person utterances, but this will destroy the thesis that traditional realist films are all in the historic mode. Not only is much dialogue that is discourse in evidence in realist films, but, as was noted in the previous chapter, there are numerous examples of traditional films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, that are narrated in the first person. Furthermore, if we determine whether or not a film is in the historic mode on the basis of whether it bears traces of enunciation, then all films with beginning and/or end titles should count as discourse.

Our objections so far have hinged upon the inadequacy of distinctions based on grammatical personhood to do the work the contemporary film theorist wants done. However, the contemporary film theorist may wish to recast the notion of the effacement of enunciation in a way that makes this process literally independent of issues of grammatical personhood. Dropping the linguistic window dressings, the contemporary theorist might wish to say that realist works efface their enunciation by masking the fact that they are productions or constructions. That is, traditional films impart the impression of transparency by effacing reference to their conditions of production, thereby appearing authorless, and, consequently, without motive, interest, or point of view, ideological or otherwise. Taken literally, this scenario is false for the kinds of reasons discussed in the last chapter. We are always aware that representations are the products of human agency; a necessary condition for the cognitive assimilation of a representation, including a realist film, is the recognition that it is a human product. If we fail to grasp the ideological implications of a film it cannot be because we take it to be authorless. A work that appeared authorless—though it is hard to know how it might do so—would probably call more rather than less attention to itself.[18]

But perhaps what is meant by the suppression of the fact of production in this context is not the effacement of the artifactuality or the production history of the film but rather some implicit denial or masking of the spectator's interpretive response. That is, the contemporary film theorist may hold that it is certain factors of the process of the production of meaning in the reception of realist films that are the facts of production that the realist film represses. A communicative exchange requires an active, interpretive response from the spectator. In order for a film to be processed, the spectator must do such things as comprehend conventions, supply presuppositions, and engage in a range of interpretive acts. The realist film, it might be claimed, encourages a spectator in the impression that this

interpretive activity is not occurring, and that the meaning of the work is "self-sufficiently" reflected in the representation. The impression of transparency here is that the communicated meaning of the film somehow is completely internal to the work, ready to yield itself automatically.

That the audience is unaware of its interpretive activity is implausible. In contemporary American society it is unfortunately a commonplace that everyone has his or her own interpretation of everything, especially of representations such as movies. Americans, with their exorbitant claims to personal interpretations of every domain of life, err in a direction that is exactly opposite that which contemporary film theorists attribute to them.[19] It is outlandish to claim that ordinary consumers of representations, such as realist films, are not aware that interpretations are involved in responding to them—ordinary spectators are the first to admit it, almost nihilistically—while it is also apparent that everyone knows that a completed communication requires a receiver. Nor is it easy to see what is involved in the supposed impression that the communicative meaning of a work is self-sufficiently contained in it. The notion is so obscure that contemporary film theorists should refrain from ascribing it to anyone.[20]

Contemporary film theorists hold that by effacing enunciation, realist representations appear transparent, which, among other things, make it seem as though they are not ideologically motivated. That is, by effacing enunciation they appear transparent in that they do not appear ideologically colored. Obviously the story about the way in which a realist representation appears authorless—that is, author-transparent—is meant to suggest a causal explanation of this ideological transparency. If a work appears uncolored by an authorial viewpoint—i.e., appears authorless—then what would an ideological viewpoint be attached to? We have, in both this chapter and the previous one, dismissed the idea that a realist representation of film appears authorless. However, even if this hypothesis is discarded, it still might be the case that an effect of realist representations and realist films, *qua* their representational and narrational apparatus, is to promote the impression that they always lack ideological motivations.

Undoubtedly, once we reject the causal hypothesis that in realist representation there is an impression of authorlessness, which calls forth an aura of ideological neutrality, it becomes hard to understand how and why simply by being a realist representation, something could give the impression that it was bereft of ideological affiliation, that is, where it does have said affiliations. Aren't there works of realist representation of unmistakable ideological affiliation—West's *The Death of General Wolfe,* Gros's *Napoleon at Arcole,* Huxley's *Brave New World,* Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will,* and

Wayne's *Green Berets*. If realism erases obvious ideological tincture, what has gone wrong in these cases?

Or perhaps the contemporary theorist believes audiences do regard these works as ideologically transparent. But what would we say of someone who claimed that these realist representations appeared to lack an ideological viewpoint? I conjecture that either such a person really does not understand what these works are about or that, more likely, such a person embraces, before encountering these respective representations, the ideological positions found in these works. That is, such a person probably takes the ideological messages in question to be true rather than ideological—on the basis of antecedent beliefs—and he regards the works as illustrations of what, for reasons external to the work, he was already predisposed to accept as an ideologically untainted fact. And certainly no one who antecedently rejects the ideological position inscribed in the previous examples will be prone to accept such representations as ideologically neutral.

If we want an account of why some people believe ideologically skewed representations, we would, I think, be better advised to attend to the antecedent beliefs such people have rather than to some special power—like transparency—that realist representation is thought to automatically acquire by effacing enunciation. I am not denying that representation, including film, plays a part in the educational process through which people develop beliefs. Rather I am suggesting that it will be the examination of concrete cases of educational processes over time which will deliver accounts of why certain ideological messages are not regarded as such by ordinary spectators. That is, the history of the inculcation of certain beliefs instead of the investigation of the structure of representation—in terms of a quasi-formal effect like transparency—will be the most promising avenue of research.[21]

The preceding argument advanced by means of examples of representations whose ideological commitments are quite overt. But the contemporary film theorist might claim that it is not those sorts of works that notions of transparency and the effacement of enunciation are meant to explicate. Rather, we should think of more quotidian and covert examples such as TV police shows, advertisements, and horror films.

First, contra many contemporary theorists, I should say that I am not persuaded that every popular representation conveys a message that is ideological, partly because it is unclear that every one of them contains a message and partly because a suitably constrained concept of ideology may not be applicable to all of those remaining representations which can be said to have messages. Furthermore, I think, it is just false to suppose that

ordinary viewers are lulled by some transparency effect into believing that advertisements are not motivated by interests which the viewer easily identifies. Nor do I think that viewers are automatically blinded to the ideological function of the police shows and doctors' shows that reassure us that we are in the care of public servants who are incredibly committed and tremendously talented.

But if viewers fail to analyze these messages it may be attributable to a combination of the sort of complacency engendered by being bombarded by a surfeit of such messages and by the fact that viewers bracket such exercises under the rubric of entertainment, a category of things not to be taken seriously. Psychological and sociological study of both the causes and effects of complacency and of prevailing notions of entertainment, then, seem better starting points for investigation here than the examination of the structure of realist representation and narration as such—that is, if we want to study the ideological effectiveness of popular culture.

Of course, it may be the case that many viewers do not recognize the ideologically skewed representations found in popular narratives. But again this may have less to do with some transparency effect or effaced enunciation than with the fact that viewers already accept the ideology embodied in such a narrative. For example, in current horror films, like *Halloween*, sexually active women are often punished by gruesome executions. If audiences fail to recognize the ideological significance of this, it is probably because they accept these executions as somehow morally appropriate.

I am not denying that a spectator may acquire an ideological belief in the course of viewing a film narrative. However, this appears to occur most often when an ideological conviction is presented by a character whom the spectator already admires or approves of because of that character's not necessarily ideological virtues—strength, cunning, cool, beauty, courage, fortitude, wit, expertise, honesty, knowledge, civility, etc.[22] But this is not an effect of realist narration as such. It is a persuasive technique available to high-school football coaches and filmmakers alike. And there is no reason to believe that this rhetorical strategy must be placed in the service of ideology in every realist narrative. Nor need this rhetorical strategy be limited to cases of the historical mode of narration.

Whereas contemporary film theorists, by means of notions such as the effacement of enunciation, wish to insist that narration is inherently ideological, I want to stress that narration as such is ideologically neutral. This by no means denies that there are certain narrative films that are ideological nor that there are certain narrative devices that are often used to promote ideology. For example, that women are dependent, that they want to be

raped and dominated by men, is a theme of Lina Wertmuller's *Swept Away*. The film seems to propound this view as an eternal law about the nature of women. But the sense that this is an eternal truth in this film is not projected by the effacement of enunciation but is secured by the deserted island device, a trope which at least since *Robinson Crusoe* has been used to portray how people, supposedly, really are. The thinking behind this device is crudely experimental; it assumes, *pace* Aristotle, that human nature as it really is will only be revealed once people are removed from the network of social relations and restricted in a lonely laboratory. A similar device for abstracting human nature is the atomic war which destroys society leaving us to, well, live naturally. Pulp novels like *Day of the Triffids*, *The Stand*, and *Lucifer's Hammer*, and films like *Night of the Living Dead*, *Parasite*, and the *Mad Max* series are examples of this. We can analyze these works profitably in terms of the way in which the-end-of-the-world device presents some politically significant feature of human life as a fact of human nature. But this device is not an example of narrative as such but rather is one type of plot, which, by the way, could have a first person narrator as does *Road Warrior*. That is, rather than supposing that all realist narration has some ideological effect as a result of its putative effacement of enunciation, we can note that ideology is often projected, and not always successfully, in specific films through the use of certain recurring rhetorical strategies and plot devices. These strategies need not always be employed to organize ideological material, but they may be so deployed frequently enough that it would be useful for film theorists to attempt to isolate and enumerate them. Admitting this, however, does not commit us to agreeing that realist narration as such is ideological.

Contemporary film theorists also believe that the purported effacement of enunciation in realist narrative as well has the effect of instilling in spectators the belief that they are unified subjects. The film effaces enunciation in such a way that the spectator identifies himself as the enunciator, which gives the film a sense of completeness or harmonious wholeness which positions the spectator as a unified subject. We shall take up the notion that the narration positions the film spectator in the next section. However, before concluding this section, it is useful to ask whether the first step in this account seems plausible. Namely, do I, when watching a film in which enunciation has been effaced, regard myself as the enunciator?

The problems with an affirmative answer to this question parallel certain of the problems that arose with respect to camera identification in the last chapter. How, if I regarded myself as the enunciator of the film could I square this with the fact that many of our typical responses to things like

suspense films, mystery films, and horror films depend on the fact that I don't know what is going to happen. Moreover, with these experiences, I know that I don't know what the next reel will bring. It is my awareness that I don't know whether the heroine will go over the waterfall that primes my feeling of suspense. Also, I am surprised by what happens in films, and sometimes shocked. Clearly, characteristic responses to films in terms of suspense, mystery, shock, surprise, and so on presuppose that I do not have the knowledge that the enunciator has, and that I am often aware of this. So the problem is this: how can I be aware that I do not have all the knowledge regarding the story that the enunciator has, and at the same time think I am the enunciator?

Perhaps at this point the notion of disavowal will be bruited about. But how will this work? Will I disavow my lack of knowledge about the denouement of a suspense scene? Is it even logically possible? It is at least hard to know how one could do this, if I really don't know the outcome of the scene, and, as well, if one did, would the scene remain suspenseful? Furthermore, whatever is involved in the idea of my identification with the enunciator is very vague. I don't leave a screening of *The Paradine Case,* saying "Hi, I'm Alfred Hitchcock," nor do I berate myself during or after seeing a boring or ridiculous film. Perhaps the idea that spectators misrecognize themselves as the enunciators of realist films is an idea whose time has passed.

THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF NARRATIVE

For contemporary film theorists, the narrative element in what are thought of as realist films is a crucial element in the positioning of spectators as unified subjects, in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense. Narrative is said to be able to perform this function because it moves from a state of equilibrium to one of disequilibrium to one of equilibrium, which final state promotes the feeling of homogeneity which is used as the basis for a sense of subject unity. Leading contemporary film theorist Stephen Heath writes: "Narrativization is scene and movement, balance (with genres as specific instances of equilibrium)—for homogeneity, containment."[23] Here, it is probably best if we have in the forefront of our thinking a movie, that is, a popular mass entertainment film of the type that dominates the international, commercial cinema. Such narrative movies, according to contemporary film theorists like Heath, begin with a state of equilibrium which is disrupted—E.T. and his friends are interrupted by earthlings in

such a way that E.T. is left stranded—and which original state is finally restored after the plot complications have unraveled—E.T. rejoins his own kind; E.T. goes home. The plot of a typical narrative movie is a set of transformations which operate on a series of disequilibriums with the net result that some sort of narrative equilibrium emerges. Heath writes:

> A narrative action is a series of elements held in a relation of transformation such that their consecution—the movement of the transformation from the ones to the others—determines a state S' different to an initial state S. Clearly the action includes S and S' that it specifies as such—beginning and end are grasped from this action, within the relations it sustains; the fiction of the film is its "unity," that of the narrative. A beginning, therefore, is always a violence, the interruption of the homogeneity of S (once again, the homogeneity—S itself—being recognized in retrospect from that violence, that interruption); in *Touch of Evil* this is literal: the explosion of a bomb-planted car, killing two passengers. The task of the narrative—the point of the transformation—is to resolve the violence, to replace it in a new homogeneity. "Replace" here, it must be noted, has a double edge: on the one hand, the narrative produces something new, replaces S with S'; on the other, this production is the return of the same, S' replaces S is the reinvestment of its elements. Hence, the constraint of the need for exhaustion, the requirement of practicability: every element must be used up in the resolution, the dispersion provoked by the violence must be turned into a reconvergence. Ideally, a narrative would be the perfect symmetry of this movement: the kiss the explosion postpones is resumed in the kiss of the close of the film as Susan is reunited with Vargas—the same kiss but delayed, set into a narrative.[24]

One of Heath's presiding metaphors in describing the work of movie narrative is "getting things back into place." In the beginning of *Touch of Evil,* the leading female character is morally (that is, sexually) untarnished. The "disrupting" complications of the plot throw her reputation into question. The conclusion reinstates her virtue. Heath does not claim that every detail presented in a plot does in fact play into this transformation-substitution nexus, but only that a realistically narrated plot gives the impression (illusion) of this sort of homogeneity, and that pleasure in narratives is grounded in the tension between equilibrium and disequilibrium (homogeneity and heterogeneity) in which homogeneity ultimately wins out. The transformation-substitution process (which governs closure) plus the narrative's consistency (presumably its logical consistency and its internal cause-and-effect plausibility), plus its economy (the gun that appears in the first scene goes off in the last scene) give the narrative movie its unity, a Althusserian-Lacanian homogeneity in which the moving picture presents itself in the totalized form of a narrative image, "a kind of static

portrait in which it comes together."[25] The repetitions inherent in the transformation-substitution process (and the logic of other aspects of narrative structure) imbue the movie as a whole with the appearance of homeostasis, the illusion of a static (unchanging) equilibrium in the service of an impression of homogeneity, wholeness, and plenitude.

> In its films, classic cinema is a certain balance of repetition: a movement of difference and the achievement in that movement of recurrent images—for example, the woman as "the same," a unity constantly refound. Narrativization, the process of the production of the film as narrative, is the operation of the balance, tying up the multiple elements—the whole festival of potential affects, rhythms, intensities, times, differences—into a line of coherence (advances and recall), a finality for the repetition.[26]

The narrative of a movie involves a play of repetition and difference, of equilibrium and disequilibrium. Pleasure with the film is generated in this play. But ultimately the economy of the movie narrative is rooted in equilibrium and that which has been disrupted or thrown off balance is finally restored. This returns the film to a state of balance or equipoise which confirms the spectator's illusory position in relation to the address as a unified, centered subject which ideology requires.

Film, of course, does not center or position the spectator as a unified subject merely by means of narrative. As we learned in the previous chapter, perspective also is a crucial element in this process. Perspective and narrative work in concert to position or center the spectator as a unified subject. Moreover, the nature of the relationship of perspective and narrative in film is quite special; film narrative can be said to *stabilize* cinematic perspective in a way that assures that the subject positioning brought about by perspective will not be undone by the movement of film.

That is, Heath and his followers believe that the operation of pictorial perspective in film faces certain formal problems that do not exist with respect to the functioning of perspective in painting. These problems are a result of the fact that there is movement of character and camera in film. This movement putatively provokes a crisis within the perspective system, since, for example, with every cut the subject's position is altered. How does the dominant, realist cinema camouflage this so that the spectator does not become apprised of the disunity of subject positions from shot to shot? The answer is to be found in narrative.

Each perspectively correct film image positions the spectator. But the ideological effect of perspective in film is threatened by cinematic movement. For Heath and his followers, character movement, camera move-

ment, and editing potentially imperil the subject position constructed by the film image through perspective. This assumed, the question, then, is how in the dominant, realist cinema, whose ideological task is to position subjects, the filmic system is able to sustain the perspective effect, despite the potentially conflicting disruptions of cinematic movement? Here narrative is invoked. The coherence of a narrative positions the subject and maintains the perspective illusion by centering the subject through diegetic intelligibility, equilibrium, and closure. The narrative is able to do this because, like perspective, narrative is a system that places and centers subjects. Perspective and narrative are not only coordinated systems but also systems that independently have the same effect. If and when the perspective system begins to flag, the same effect is imposed on the spectator by the story. We might think of perspective and narrative as two pumps, calibrated to bail out a set volume of water. When the perspective pump sputters, the narrative pump makes up the difference, though the less reliable perspective pump is still an irreplaceable asset to the system insofar as the given volume of water could not be evacuated without it. Heath writes:

> Narrative contains the mobility that could threaten the clarity of vision in a constant renewal of perspective; space becomes place—narrative as the taking place of film—in a movement which is no more than the fulfillment of the Renaissance impetus. . . . what enters cinema is a logic of movement [human action] and it is this logic that, in other words, is constructed as narrative space.[27]

Once films are films of people, the spectator is centered by the logic of human action, thus compensating for the distractions of human movement in the perspectival array. For Heath, it seems that the presence of people in a film image is a sufficient condition for considering the image narrative (though this does seem an overly broad notion of narrative). Moreover, the narrative of such an image stabilizes the subject position. As shots are added to shots through editing or as the camera moves, the subject center is sustained by the coherence of the story as an intelligible representation of human action which tends toward equilibrating and balancing disruptions whether perceptual or diegetic.

So far, then, we have isolated at least these three hypotheses about the internal structure and function of film narrative: that film narrative is an equilibrating system, based on the process of transformation and substitution; that this equilibrating system stabilizes the potential disruption of the centering work of perspective; and that the narrative system, by means of its

tendency toward balance, along with the perspective system, functions to center or to position the spectator as a unified subject in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense of that term. How plausible are these hypotheses?

Movie narration gives the film an aura of wholeness or homogeneity, which aura is relevant to the spectator's misapprehension of himself as a unified subject. The impression of unity of the film, in virtue of its narrative structure, gets translated into subject unity. Every sort of narrative unity-making device is credited with the same effect as the replacement-transformation-repetition-equilibrium scheme. The strongest case for the unity or homogeneity instilling capacity of classical realist narratives is made by the notion that movie narratives are machines for replacing disruptions of an initial state of affairs by repetitions of the initial state of affairs—E.T. with his ship; E.T. separated from his ship; E.T. back with his ship. However, the connection between this kind of plot structure and a feeling of wholeness, homogeneity, and unity on the part of the spectator may be based merely on the blurring of important distinctions.

It might appear that the citation of this sort of plot repetition warrants the postulation of a response in terms of wholeness, homogeneity, and unity because this kind of repetition is often called "circular" by literary critics, and in the same (rather free) associative mood we might call it "static," which would tempt us to "unchanging," which might seem to be enough to argue that the causal conditions are in place for us to be infected by a fantasy of homogeneity, an impression of undifferentiated wholeness and plenitude.

However, such an explication is easily stopped by pointing out that spectators who are entertained by circular structures do not literally believe they have witnessed an unchanging or static image, nor do circular narratives have a special potential for evoking impressions of wholeness or plenitude. Rather, *circular, static,* and *unchanging* are really critical metaphors that describe certain patterns of literal *change* in traditional realist narratives.

Let us, however, suppose that there is an argument for a connection between narrative repetition and the spectator's purported impression of homogeneity and subject unity. It must then be pointed out that the type of repetitive device Heath has in mind is only one type of narrative ending. A narrative may also end in the reversal of an original state of affairs, for example, *Bringing Up Baby* or the remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Or a narrative may end in an event which stands in merely a consequent (and neither a symmetrical or anti-symmetrical) relation to earlier narrative states, for example, *Nashville* or *Kiss Me Deadly*. Nor need narratives be comprised of scenes that vary earlier scenes either as repetitions of motifs or

as subplots. Thus, even if narrative repetition could be connected with the appropriate form of homogeneity, it would account for only one type of narrative device and an optional one at that.

Moreover, there are dimensions of narrative unity in movies that are not dependent upon the repetition or recapitulation of scenes. A film's narrative logic (the structure that organizes what follows what), its narrative economy, the internal plausibility of the film's causal relations, and the film's consistency are each unity-making features, though none of them requires repetitions or variations of earlier scenes in order to operate. Narrative economy does demand repetition of certain objects and characters, but not, however, the repetition of scenes. Heath treats all the unity making features of movie narrative as if they were the same, and he speaks as if they all produced the response in terms of wholeness, homogeneity, and unity that he attributes to narrative repetitions. But this is only the result of his confusing all of narrative's different structural unities with the type of unity he associates with the transformation-replacement model. Where Heath should be differentiating strata of effect, he is congealing them. Furthermore, Heath cannot argue that other increments of narrative coherence, for example, consistency, can be explicated by the repetition effect on the grounds that these other devices are always subservient to the ideal of narrative symmetry. Narrative logic, economy, plausibility, and consistency can and do operate in films that do not have scene repetitions and symmetries. These unity-making features are quite independent and distinct from the symmetries of the transformation-replacement schema and should be analyzed individually.

Contemporary film theorists have attempted to use the equilibrium model as a general model for analyzing the dominant film narrative of realist movies, but it is a blunt instrument.[28] It is not the case that all movie narratives begin with a state of affairs that is restored at the end. A great many films begin with an untoward state of affairs—the goodly townfolk savaged by the cattle ranchers—and end with its reversal—the cowboys vanquished by the lone gunslinger turned avenging angel. If there is anything that we could profitably call an initial equilibrium here, it preexists the film either as a golden age or as an ideal of law and order. Nor need a film begin with an untoward state of affairs that the film proceeds to correct: a character may just be unmarried, for example, only to be wed by the ending. Calling this a transformation-repetition is simply wrong, as is saying that the film must begin with some equilibrium. It begins. It begins with some state of affairs or some event which may be restored (if only symbolically), reversed, or merely forgotten.

Nor, where the film begins with a state of affairs, is it accurate to say it is

always disturbed or disrupted by violence.[29] This may be a dramatic mode of speech, but films do not require disturbances of equilibriums for the narrative to proceed; they require *changes* which may be neither disruptive nor violent: the male romantic lead notices that the girl next door is suddenly "all-growed-up," or a billionaire hears so and so sing and decides to bankroll a show. Also, a film may end without restoring either initial or ideal states of affairs: e.g., *King Kong* or *You Only Live Once*.

Of course, a researcher may take it to be definitional that a film narrative in the dominant realist tradition of movie ends in a balanced state or equilibrium and then go on to take any type of closure as a case of equilibrium. But then *equilibrium* no longer has any explanatory power; it becomes just another word for *the end* (and, in this theory, for *the beginning*). *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* achieves closure, but not as a state of equilibrium generated by repetition. If we call its ending an equilibrium then that term is merely synonymous with closure, the very thing the equilibrium model supposedly explicates.[30]

The transformation-substitution model of realist film narration, as stated, allows a certain ambiguity on the issue of whether the balance achieved in closure is formal (the repetition of an initial scene) or moral (the restoration of a preferred social order). In Heath's example of *Touch of Evil*, the logic of narrative and the law of patriarchy converge in their effect; both determine the restoration of the woman's virtue. And certainly the structure of the narrative can reinforce the moral of a film in this way.[31] But these two elements of a narrative film are very distinguishable and may not be synchronized to achieve such harmonious effects.

A film, for example, like *The Circus*, can begin and end with moral disequilibrium while formally repeating the tramp's initial condition in the conclusion; or a movie such as *Dead of Night* or *Invaders from Mars* (either version) can begin in moral order and proceed to moral disorder while the beginning formally mirrors the end; and, of course, there is the very common case of movement from moral disorder to order without a formal structure of repetition. This last case can become especially tricky for researchers committed to the equilibrium model because they are tempted to take films that restore some moral order (rather than some specific scene) as confirmations of the theory when literally they are not.

Heath also writes as if the transformation-replacement-repetition schema were the same as plot resolution when the former is merely one form of the latter. This obfuscation of class and subclass may prompt some theorists to look always to the end of the film in order to explain its structure, finding there some repetition of or similarity to the beginning. With enough cleverness, and with broad enough notions of repetition and similarity,

success is almost assured. But this enterprise is likely to miss the point of the actual plot resolution for the sake of stressing some repetition. You could say that *Annie* opens and closes with the titular juvenile singing, but this misses the thrust of the narrative climax: she is now rich and has a daddy whereas she started poor and an orphan. If you respond that the film has reproduced the ideologically predictable moral order of things, you are probably right, but you have switched from a discussion of formal order based on repetition to a discussion of an ideal ethical equilibrium.

The transformation-replacement-repetition schema of the internal structure of movie narrative is not refined enough to deal with the data. To make it appear to work, one must either inflate its central concepts so that they will fit anything, or bend the evidence to fit the preordained scheme, or a little bit of both. From the viewpoint of advancing our understanding of the narrative operation of film, the equilibrium model, in short, is thoroughly inadequate.

The repetition schema of movie narrative is thought to participate in the positioning of subjects in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense of the unified subject. Such narratives are, for example, thought of as "centering" subjects. However, one must ask here whether or not the ostensible intelligibility of the theory is based on much more than punning. Something that is balanced or in equilibrium, like a teeter-totter, often has a literal center; so one might think that a balanced film has a center in virtue of which it positions or centers subjects. But even if balanced plots have centers, it is not because of their centers that plots are equilibrated. That is, in a film with twenty scenes, scene number ten may be the literal center, but that need have nothing to do with the fact that the plot is balanced; the main character, for example, wanted a wife, overcame obstacles, and got married; there is no point that is the *center* of this process in the sense Althusserian-Lacanians require. That a plot reaches equilibrium does not provide the special connection with centering that film theorists presuppose. There is no special relation between plot equilibrium and centering, though talk of "equilibrium" and "balance" may confusedly suggest one.

However, the theory discussed earlier, that narrative functions to stabilize the centering of the subject brought about by perspective, may appear to supply the requisite connection between the narrative and a center. Supposedly, movement in cinema threatens the centering of the subject secured by perspective, but this prospect is counterbalanced by narrative; the intelligibility of narrative masks the disruption of the perspectival center of the cinematic image. But this theory rests on the dubious presupposition that the perspective effect is somehow endangered by cinematic movement.

There is no evidence that movement in film causes a disruption of the

perceptual work done by perspective, however we characterize that work. There is no evidence, for example, that editing, at standard rates, causes any perceptual confusion or unclarity. Nor is this lack of evidence due to the fact that most people watch narratively stabilized films. With regard to editing, for example, the final row of replacement images in Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* is easily comprehended, in terms of its visual content, by normal viewers despite the renewal of the station point from shot to shot. Film viewers will sometimes report confusion or disturbance if certain kinds of shots are edited together too rapidly. The effect may be to animate the contours in these shots and to leave the impression of tumult in the images. Yet, this is not caused by the renewal of station points but by the appearance of motion generated by stroboscopic or beta phenomena. Moreover, this type of visual disturbance can occur whether a film has a narrative or not or whether its images are perspectival. So this type of disturbance does not provide the requisite evidence. Insofar as there is no evidence that perspective is imperiled by the types of cinematic movement described earlier, the theory is mistaken. One cannot suppose that the narrative is solving the problem of the disturbance of perspective by means of compensating for the viewer's compromised center. For where there is no problem, there is no solution. That is, the theory is predicated on imputing a function to narrative in relation to perspective. But the motive for attributing this function to narrative and, therefore, the function itself are groundless.

One might attempt to meet this objection by saying that I am misconceiving the problem as a perceptual one, and that this misleads me to look for perceptual evidence of the putative disturbances of perspective. A contemporary film theorist might prefer to say that the postulated disturbance is of the subject's position as a psychic center and not any disturbance detectable by the naked eye in the visual field. But shouldn't something as conditioned by vision as the subject center of perspective yield some correlative disturbance in perception when it is disrupted? That is, how can this subject center of vision be dislodged by occurrences like the renewal of station points without any trace of that eruption showing up in the normal viewing experiences of, for example, a succession of perspectivally correct, nonnarrative images (such as Bruce Conner's *Valse Triste*)? The theory of the narrative stabilization of perspective constructs a tier of spectator illusions which originate in perception—the perception of perspective and its disturbance—but which are not supported by the data of film perception. We are given subject centers that are both visual and metapsychological/metaphysical entities, and we are given their putative interrelations, but

at the ground level of vision we have no evidence for the initiating disturbance which purportedly sets the illusion machine in motion. And as we will see in the next chapter in our discussion of suture, this is a recurring, though intellectually befuddled, theoretical strategy in contemporary film analysis—to erect a psychological theory where there are absolutely no data to motivate the postulation of specific psychological mechanisms nor any data to constrain the elaboration of the details of the mechanism.

Apart from the question of whether film narratives stabilize perspective, contemporary film theory makes another substantive claim, one holding that perspective and narrative are systems that serve the same purpose by producing the same effect, namely centering. But this basically proceeds by describing the effects of perspective and the various effects of narrative by means of the same terms; both are said to place, position, and center spectators in such a way that spectators acquire the illusion that they are unified subject centers.[32] But if perspective imparts a central position illusion to spectators, it must be granted that this is putatively in some sense a spatial illusion—an illusion of occupying a literal place in regard to which the geographic layout and structure of the image is perspicuous. But when we read that the narrative places, positions, and centers subjects by means of narrative logic, coherence, and meaning, we note that though the terms are spatial, the illusions they purportedly describe are those of intelligibility, homogeneity, and unity, and not necessarily of space. So there is no reason to suppose that perspective and narration perform equivalent or even comparable functions. Moreover, when spectator-subjects are described as centered or positioned, these terms have yet further senses, ones connected to our feelings of being unified and stable. The putative causal connection between the centered image and the centered narrative, and then the centered subject, is really nothing more than a function of ambiguously describing the three different types of phenomena by the same words and presuming that this shows them to be causally interrelated. But this is patently a well-known fallacy of informal reasoning.[33]

Of course, the contemporary film theorist may want to argue that narrative does its work in producing unified subjects through its impression of coherence which triggers a Lacanian type of psychic mechanism into conjuring up a sense of wholeness and subject unity. The effect of the realist film is said to be wholeness and that impression of wholeness both appropriates and reinforces the sense of subject unity. Here, one supposes, that the coherence of the narrative calls into play at least the psychic mechanism of the Imaginary. But this raises questions of a sort we have already encountered. Namely, how can the Imaginary's purported response to its

coherent image in the looking glass be extrapolated as the model of its response to the coherence of a narrative? The causes are radically different; they would not seem likely to produce the same effect. Indeed, the only thing they have in common is that they are described by the same word, viz., "coherent," though, in truth, that word has different criteria of application when used with reference to narratives and bodies. So even if there is some Imaginary sense of wholeness, rooted in our supposed mirror stage, there is no reason to attribute that as an effect of narrative, save by way of equivocation.

AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT OF MOVIE NARRATION

Contemporary film theory is concerned with explaining many effects of film narration—such as the stabilization of narration and the transparency effect—which I have denied are plausible effects to attribute to film narration. However, the repetition-transformation model is a legitimate, if failed, theoretical endeavor. That is, it certainly is theoretically fair game to attempt to describe the general structure of film narration. Thus, in order to persuasively discard that model, I will attempt to offer a competing model whose handling of the data is more comprehensive and precise.

However, before setting out my competing viewpoint, I must stress that my theory is not one of film narration but more specifically of movie narration. I wish to characterize the narrative structure of popular movies and TV shows rather than the narrative structures of modernist masterpieces like *Last Year At Marienbad* or Duras's films. I do think that a theory of movie narration may have interesting consequences for what we say of other varieties of film narration. But my theory pertains, first and foremost, to movie narration, to the process by which popular films and (narrative) TV shows render sequences of events coherent.

The approach to movie narration that I advocate was suggested by Pudovkin.[34] It has not been developed further by film scholars. Perhaps the reason for this is that Pudovkin's tone is prescriptive; he is telling prospective filmmakers how they ought to construct films; and such *overt* polemicism is often shunned by scholars. However, it is important to remember that Pudovkin, like Kuleshov,[35] was involved in distilling and conceptualizing central elements of what they observed in American cinema, e.g., Kuleshov's points about the importance for rapid editing of succinct, uncluttered set design. Kuleshov and Pudovkin, of course, were motivated by practical concerns. They studied American films, contrasting them with Russian films, in order to discern what made the American films of the

twenties more effective with popular audiences than comparable Russian films. And they were interested in this matter because they wished to forge a Soviet cinema that would be a powerful mass art. In their investigation of American films, the very paradigms of what I'm calling movies, Pudovkin and Kuleshov identified, clarified, and articulated certain latent, stylistic principles that seemed to determine and were exhibited by American film practice. As recommendations about the way in which cinema should be, Kuleshov's and Pudovkin's theories are surely open to question. Nevertheless, when examined for their insightful and accurate crystallizations of the tendencies inherent in existing film practices, their remarks, reconceived as observations, are quite impressive and useful. Specifically, I believe that Pudovkin's analysis of the approach to editing together or connecting scenes supplies us with a starting point for outlining the structure of one of the basic, if not the most basic, linear narrative forms in the history of the movies.[36]

A movie will portray a sequence of scenes or events, some appearing earlier, some later. A practical problem that confronts the filmmaker is the way in which these scenes are to be connected, i.e., what sort of relation do the earlier scenes bear to the later ones. Pudovkin suggests that the relation of earlier scenes and events in a film narrative to later scenes and events can be generally understood on the model of the relation of a question to an answer. One can grasp this by recalling primitive, two-shot narratives. In the first shot, a child might be kidnapped. This raises the question: "Will the child be saved or not?" The next and last shot answers the question; the police apprehend a racially stereotyped Eastern or Southern European, and the child is rescued. The basic narrative connective—the rhetorical bond between the two scenes—is the question/answer.

The importance of this relation, which I call "erotetic," can be seen in films more complex than two-shot narratives. If a giant shark appears offshore, unbeknownst to the local authorities, and begins to ravage lonely swimmers, this scene or series of scenes (or this event or series of events) raises the question of whether the shark will ever be discovered. This question is likely to be answered in some later scene when someone figures out why all those swimmers are missing. At that point, when it is learned that the shark is very, very powerful and nasty to boot, the question arises about whether it can be destroyed or driven away. The ensuing events in the film serve to answer that question. Or, if some atomic bombs are skyjacked in the opening scenes, this generates questions about who stole them and for what purposes. Once the generally nefarious purposes of the hijacking are established, the question arises whether these treacherous

intents can be thwarted. Or, for a slightly more complicated scenario, shortly after a jumbo jet takes off we learn that the entire crew has just died from food poisoning while also learning that the couple in first class is estranged. These scenes raise the questions of whether the plane will crash and whether the couple in first class will be reconciled by their common ordeal. Maybe we also ask if the alcoholic priest in coach will find God again. It is the function of the later scenes in the film to answer these questions.

Since most film narratives involve a series of actions, it may seem natural to think that causation is the major connective between scenes in movies. However, it is implausible to suggest that scenes follow each other in most film narratives via a chain of causal *entailments*. I would guess that most succeeding narrative scenes are causally underdetermined by what precedes them. Rather the connection is weaker than a causal one. Earlier narrative scenes raise or intimate questions, issues, or possibilities that are answered or actualized by later scenes. A character robs a bank; this raises two well-structured possibilities: he will be caught/he will not be caught. In the next scene, the police, hitherto unseen, grab him as he exits the back door of the bank. The later scene is not causally implied by the earlier scene. Instead the earlier scene raised a structured set of possibilities, one of which the later scene realized.[37]

Using the idea of a question to capture the idea of raising narrative possibilities seems appropriate since the most convenient way in ordinary language to state such possibilities is "Will x happen or not?" The concept of the question, as well, enables us to explain one of the most apparent audience responses toward linear movie narratives: expectation. That is, the spectator expects answers to the questions the film raises or intimates about its fictional world.

Some readers may balk at the preceding account on the grounds that it does not seem plausible to characterize the spectators of movies as engaged in a constant process of question formation. Such spectators are not introspectively aware of framing questions nor are they moving their lips—silently speaking said questions—as scenes flicker by. So in what respect is it accurate to say that such spectators are possessed of the kind of questions so far discussed?

Clearly I must say that such spectators frame narrative questions tacitly, and that they subconsciously (rather than unconsciously) expect answers to them. The notion of a subconscious expectation—one we are unaware of until it is perhaps short circuited—should cause no difficulty. When we are told the plumbers will turn off the water for an hour, we still surprise

ourselves by expectantly walking over to the sink. But maybe it is thought that some special problem arises when our subconscious expectation takes the form of a question (which awaits an answer) rather than being based on a reason or a belief. True, reasons and beliefs are best represented by assertions rather than by questions. But then, of course, if anything hinges on this grammatical point, we might think to recast our narrative questions as assertions—e.g., as predictions taking a disjunctive form such as "either x will happen or y will happen or x will not happen. . . ." But, in fact, to hold that a thought cannot be subconscious, depending on the grammatical format of its representation, is a highly unlikely hypothesis.

Needless to say, objectors to my characterization of spectators as question-formers may have in mind another issue—viz., that spectators are not involved in *explicit acts* of questioning when watching films. But here the error is to confuse having a question—which may be an implicit and tacit matter—with performing a self-conscious operation. Not all mental processes can be equated with consciously performed processes; nor are all mental states—such as having a question—to be equated with performing a mental action such as that of internal question-posing.

When following a narrative film, I want to say, a spectator internalizes the whole structure of interests depicted in the drama, and this structure includes alternative outcomes to various lines of action which the spectator must keep track of in some sense before one alternative is actualized in order for the film to be received as intelligible. I postulate that the spectator does this by tacitly projecting the range of outcomes as subconscious expectations which we can represent as questions. One argument in favor of the tacit question model is that it explains how spectators are able to regard films as intelligible. Another reason is supplied by the result of subverting the postulated expectations. If we stop the film midway, the tacit questions soon surface: "Well, did he marry the princess, or did she fly around the world?" greet us when the projector hum dies down.

At first glance, it may appear that the question/answer model is ill-conceived to handle flashback scenes; however, the purpose of most flashbacks is to answer (or to offer information in the direction of an answer to) questions about why characters are behaving as they do, or why they are as they are, in antecedent scenes. Though further qualifications are necessary, my central hypothesis is that the major connective or logical relation in one of the most basic form of linear movie narratives is erotetic. You can turn on your TV any night of the week and find several movies and weekly programs whose basic plot structure can be almost completely explained on the interrogatory model.

The ways in which a question is made salient by a scene or group of scenes is diverse, and will occupy much of the next chapter. A great deal of the work is done in the writing, not only the dialogue and/or the intertitles, but also in the choice of subject and the dramatic focus of given scenes—i.e., the dramatic organization of the scene will make it clear that the major issue is, for example, "will x propose to y?" or "will z draw his gun?" This is not to say that nonverbal factors like gesture, framing, character, and camera position are not major components in leading an audience to regard a certain set of characters and their intentions as primary nodes of interest. Obviously, a whole ensemble of stylistic choices, often redundant ones, prompt the audience to identify this or that issue as central in a scene. Suppose a telephone is off the hook in the distant, blurry background of a shot while a character is begging for a loan from a rotund banker, center-frame foreground, in a well-lit, large medium close-shot. We know the question the scene raises is whether the petitioner will receive the loan (or, more broadly, will he get the money he needs?) and not whether the phone will be hung up. And we expect ensuing scenes or events to answer that question.

Though the question/answer structure is fundamental to certain linear movie narratives, such narratives are not comprised baldly of simple questions and answers. Not every scene or event in the narrative can be described as a simple question or answer. Most linear movie narratives have scenes with more complicated functions than providing a simple question or answer. The following is an inductive characterization of the scenes in an idealized, erotetic, linear movie narrative: an event or scene in an erotetic narrative is:

1. an establishing scene—an event or a series of events or a state of affairs that introduces characters, locales, etc., or that establishes important attributes of a character, locale, etc., and that, perhaps, but not necessarily, raises or intimates a question. An establishing scene often initiates a movie but one can come at any point in the film when the story involves the addition of new characters, locales, etc.

2. a questioning scene. (More than one question may be introduced or intimated in such a scene.)

3. an answering scene. (More than one question may be answered in such a scene.)[38]

4. a sustaining scene. A scene may continue and intensify an earlier question. The question, "will x escape," is intensified by a subsequent scene in which we learn that, unbeknownst to x, he is surrounded. A scene that

begins to answer a narrative question but then frustrates the answer—e.g., a detective follows up the wrong clue—is also a sustaining scene.

5. an incomplete answering scene. A partial answer may be given to a preceding question, e.g., "who killed Jones" is partly but not completely answered when we learn that the killer is left-handed.[39]

6. an answering/questioning scene. A preceding question may be answered by a succeeding scene which *also* immediately introduces a new question. A man and a woman meet in such a way that in scene #1 the question arises whether or not they will become a couple. Scene #2 opens on a confetti-strewn bed, answering the question of scene #1. But as the man stumbles into the kitchen for breakfast, he is surprised to meet a child, his new spouse's heretofore unmentioned daughter. Suddenly, the question arises as to whether or not this new variable will endanger the new relationship. Several ensuing scenes or an entire film could be devoted to answering this question.

By using the question/answer model as the core concept of this categorization of linear narrative scenes and events, I am not suggesting that it is a competitor with taxonomies based on temporal relations—e.g., parallel scenes, flashbacks, flashforwards, etc. The interrogative—will x be executed or not?—can be articulated by two alternating questioning scenes of parallel narration, as in *Intolerance*. The idea of parallel narration describes a temporal relation in the fictional world of the movie while the question/answer format describes the rhetorical-logical relation of scenes in the film's structure.

These six functions (plus the fulfilling scene discussed in note 38) give us a picture of the basic skeleton of a great many narrative movies. Whether a scene or an event is part of the core plot of a linear narrative movie depends on whether it is one of these types of scenes, i.e., whether it is part of the circuit of questions and answers that powers the film. A scene that is not an establishing scene is a digression if it lies outside the network of questions and answers. A digression, of course, need not necessarily be something bad; digressions may enrich the movie as a whole, as well as detract from it. But a scene in a linear narrative movie will be a digression, for good or ill, if it does not perform one of the core functions on our list.[40]

I hasten to add that I am not saying that all film narratives are or should be erotetic linear narratives. Especially in art films, in contrast to popular movies, there are episodic narrative structures, such as one finds in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* or *Amarcord* in which scenes are generally linked, for realistic effect, by principles of rough temporal contiguity and often geo-

graphical propinquity, rather than in terms of questions and answers. This type of narration often has as its aim the desire to impart a holistic sense of a given milieu by itemizing or layering details concerning life in a certain culture or subculture at a given time. As in literary ventures, such as *Pictures from an Institution,* the importance of linear progression is deferred in favor of provoking an elaborate sense of the texture and tempo of the "world" depicted in the fiction. The film does not rush us forward along an arc of expectations, but is said to invite us to "live in," to appreciate the rhythms of life of, to savor (and thereby understand) the milieu that it represents.

Films can forego a linear structure for all sorts of reasons, especially for expressive effects. The scenes in *Satyricon* do not follow a question/answer logic, but that, of course, is exactly what engenders the alien, mysterious quality that Fellini sought when he created what he called this "science fiction" film of the past. Likewise Welles' *The Trial* abruptly shifts scenes to instill a sense of arbitrariness. Fantasy films—whether supernatural or psychological—at times have scenes that could not plausibly be mapped onto the question/answer model; the apparitions of Death in *All That Jazz* could not plausibly answer any questions any spectator could have as the film proceeds; they are there to signal the egocentric view Bob Fosse has of himself as a special someone in touch with an eruptive, exclusive, transcendent reality. Modernist exercises like *Last Year at Marienbad* and *India Song* literally defy the erotetic model—they are all questions with no answers. Consequently, because of these and many other types of examples, the question/answer model does not apply to all narrative films, nor is it an evaluative grid with which we can measure the worth of every narrative film. But it is at least a description of the core structure of a great many linear narratives, particularly of the type found in mass market movies.

For my present purposes, I would like to maintain that the erotetic narrative represents the core structure of movie narration. One might also speculate (and I stress "speculate" here) that the erotetic structure of narration may represent something deeper. It may be a model of what we might call the basic film narrative. It may be the erotetic narrative that most of us have in mind when we hear the phrase "narrative movie." Two considerations count in favor of this hypothesis. On the one hand, we do perceive a difference between a mere chronicle film—my home movie of my summer vacation in which each event follows the next simply because it was what happened next—and a film like *The Lonedale Operator.* Clearly, the difference between these different representations of human action is one of structure. The question/answer model provides us with one general structural differentia that we can use to distinguish the chronicle from some-

thing that we might consider a minimal narrative film. However, such considerations only lead us to regard the erotetic model as a candidate for the title basic narrative.

The question/answer model gives us a means of differentiating one very simple narrative film type from a chronicle. But why should this type be considered more basic than the episodic film narrative or the other narrative variations alluded to previously? One reason is that we understand these alternative modes of film narration by comparing these modes to a more basic linear structure of the sort described by the erotetic model. The disjunctiveness of *Satyricon* and the attendant qualities we associate with it involve an implicit contrast or deviance from more standard forms of conjunction—which, in turn, may be related to a propensity to form certain cognitive expectations (viz., questions to be answered). The lack, omission, or foregoing of a structure that evokes expectation and/or its fulfillment is a pertinent stylistic element or choice in a film because it is a contrast to a more basic, "normal" type in which certain connectives are expected. Even with the case of the episodic structure, as it developed as a major vehicle of film realism, we note that it was able to do so in lieu of its divergence from the linear forms of classical narrative cinema. That is, part of the reason why an episodic structure is held to have a special affinity with realism—i.e., it is said to project the quality of realism—is because it is said to be looser ("more inclusive" and, thereby, "truer to reality") than the historically dominant, alternative mode of cinematic narration, viz., the linear narrator film which is based on the erotetic model.[41] My point here is not to draw an absolutely clean demarcation between erotetic narrative films and other sorts. Some films will mix elements of different narrative types in different proportions. For example, a realistic film like *The Tree of Wooden Clogs,* though predominantly episodic, employs the question /answer structure at crucial points; indeed, one of the most pressing issues in the film hinges on the question of whether the father will be caught and punished for cutting down "the tree of wooden clogs." Moreover, even if I am wrong that the erotetic model is some sort of basic film narrative, I may still be correct in asserting that it gives us an account of the core narrative structure of mass movie story telling that is far superior to the equilibrium model.

Before leaving the topic of the question/answer model of film narration, a distinction between two types of narrative questions should be drawn. I have been emphasizing the question/answer model as a means of linking scenes and events in movies. But questions are also a means for organizing whole narratives, as we saw earlier. Thus, it is worth drawing a distinction

between macro-questions and micro-questions in movie narration. In Buster Keaton's *The General,* there are three macro-questions—will Johnny Gray win his true love, will he recover his train "The General," and will he eventually succeed in enlisting in the Confederate Army. In *The General* these three questions are interrelated, of course. Gradually they dovetail with each other. When they are all answered, the film is effectively over. We don't worry about whether or not the happy couple will have three children because that is not a question raised in the film.[42] We say that a film is complete and that we feel a sense of closure when all the macro-questions in the film have been answered.[43]

The General has three macro-questions but it also has a large number of micro-questions which connect scene to scene and fictional event to fictional event. For example, in one scene the Union hijackers scatter debris on the railroad track in order to frustrate Johnny's pursuit. This is undoubtedly related to the macro-question of whether Johnny will recover his engine—one might call it an instantiation of the macro-question—but at this point the answer to the macro-question is momentarily dependent on the answer to a micro-question—will Johnny be able to handle these obstacles and avoid derailment—a question that following scenes or events answer.

Most movies are animated by macro-questions which organize the large movements of the bulk of significant action in the film and the micro-questions are generally hierarchically subordinate to the macro-questions. In *Wargames,* at a certain point, most of the action is devoted to answering the question of whether nuclear destruction can be averted. Of course, movies often have more than one macro-question. *Into the Night* asks both whether the romantic leads can escape the Middle Eastern villains *and* whether this couple will become lovers. Both macro-questions are answered by means of roughly the same sequences of action and the micro-questions and answers that structure those sequences tend, finally, to dovetail with the answers to these presiding macro-questions. What is called closure in movies can be explained as that moment when all the saliently posed and sustained questions that the movie has raised have been answered.

Though most movies are organized in terms of what have just been referred to as *presiding macro-questions,* certain films, notably serials, like *Fantomas,* and films composed of serial-like material, like *Spies,* often do not seem to have overarching or dominant macro-questions. They often seem to be a string of suspense episodes, escapes, and entrapments, that are only very broadly connected under a vague question like "will good triumph or

will evil?" Such films structure individual sequences by means of macro-questions but the whole story is not subordinated to a handful of organizing macro-questions from episode to episode. In all probability, the use of presiding macro-questions to organize films was an innovation which corresponded to the transition to the dominance of feature filmmaking in contrast to the period when serial filmmaking and features filmmaking were of roughly the same importance.[44] It is the lack of presiding macro-questions that may make the tying together of the episodes in such serials seem like a string of firecrackers going off as well as promoting the sense of temporal shapelessness that such films may occasion. But, in any case, the vast majority of movies for quite some time have not only employed the erotetic narrative structure but they have organized their questions by means of presiding macro-questions.

So far, it has been argued that movies, the products of what might be thought of as Hollywood International, narrate by generating questions that are internal to the film that subsequent scenes answer. Admittedly, this is not a form unique to film or movies, for it is also exploited in mystery novels, adventure stories, Harlequin romances, Marvel comics, and so on. Nevertheless, it is the most characteristic narrative approach in the movies.

How can this be proved? Again, the best suggestion one can make here is to embrace the question/answer model of movie narration—the erotetic model—and then turn on your TV: watch old movies and new ones, TV adventure series and romances, domestic movies and foreign mass market films. Ask yourself why the later scenes in the films make sense in the context of the earlier scenes—ask why the later scenes are there. My prediction is that you will be surprised by the extent to which later scenes are answering questions raised earlier, or are at least providing information that will contribute to such answers. In adopting the hypothesis that the narrative structure of a randomly selected movie is fundamentally a system of internally generated questions that the movie goes on to answer, you will find that you have hold of a relationship that enables you to explain what makes certain scenes especially key: they either raise questions or answer them, or perform related functions including sustaining questions already raised or incompletely answering a previous question, or answering one question but then introducing a new one.

Apart from the confirmation of the hypothesis afforded by this confrontation with the data, further support for the question/answer model might be gained by using it, not to analyze, but to develop movie scenarios. For when certain complexities and qualifications are added to the model of the erotetic narrative, it is a very serviceable guide for producing stories that

strike one as typically "movieish," especially in their economy. Partial confirmation of the question/answer model, then, would be its capacity to direct the simulation of movie scenarios.

As a theory of movie narration, the model of erotetic narration seems more comprehensive than the equilibrium model as well as more precise in its elaboration of the structure of movie narration. At the same time, it may also be especially useful in supplying an explanation of an important issue for contemporary film theorists. We have encountered Baudry's interest in explaining the powerful impression that film imparts. Now it is not clear that film, as such, has this powerful impression, though movies do. Thus, rather than search for the source of this powerful impression in a generic feature of film as film such as projection, we might search for it in a characteristic feature of movies, such as erotetic narration. The model of erotetic narration, rather than psychoanalysis, might identify the source of the powerful impression that concerned Baudry.

A successful erotetic narrative tells you, literally, everything you want to know about the action being depicted, i.e., it answers every question, or virtually every question that it has chosen to pose saliently. I say "virtually" in order to accommodate endings such as that in the original version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* where the audience is left with one last pregnant question. But even countenancing these cases, an erotetic narrative has an extraordinary degree of neatness and intellectually compelling compactness. It answers all the questions that it assertively presents to the audience, and the largest portion of its actions is organized by a small number of macro-questions, with little remainder. The flow of action approaches an ideal of uncluttered clarity. This clarity contrasts vividly with the quality of fragments of actions and events we typically observe in everyday life.

Unlike those of real life, the actions observed in movies have a level of intelligibility, due to the role they play in the erotetic system of questions and answers. Because of the question/answer structure, the audience is left with the impression that it has learned everything important to know concerning the action depicted. How is this achieved? By assertively introducing a selected set of pressing questions and then answering them—by controlling expectation by the manner in which questions are posed. The powerful impression whose source Baudry sought is nothing but the exceptional perspicuousness, economy, and clarity of the action in movies which is due to erotetic narration. The action in movies, that is, unlike most of the action we encounter outside our cinemas (and fictions), is imbued with heightened sense, direction, and intelligibility. Thus, it is not, as some

might argue, the realism of movies that compels us; rather erotetic narration, which departs from a "realist" recounting or chronicling of events, attracts us. By virtue of erotetic narration movies are not only larger than life but more legible too. Erotetic narration endows the movie with an aura of clarity while also affording an intense satisfaction of our human propensity for intelligibility.

Moreover, if the model of erotetic narration explains why whole movies attract us, in respect of their "unrealistic" intelligibility of action, the model also explains how it is we stay riveted in our seats. Given the erotetic model, we can say what it is that audiences expect: they expect answers to the questions that earlier events have made salient—will the shark be destroyed, will the jumbo jet crash, will Johnny Gray win Annabelle? If it is a general feature of our cognitive makeup that, all things being equal, we not only want but expect answers to questions that have assertively been put before us, this explains our intense engagement with movies. For even if the question is as insignificant to us as whether the suburban adolescent in *Risky Business* will be found out by his parents, our curiosity keeps us glued to the screen until it is satisfied.

5.

CINEMATIC NARRATION

A major concern of the last chapter was accounting for what might be thought of as the large-scale, or overarching coherence, of films, especially of the category of mass market movies. That is, we examined competing theories of the ways in which the narrative as a whole, so to speak, is organized. The equilibrium model proposes a process of transformation-substitution-repetition as the means by which the narrative of the movie secures intelligibility, whereas the erotetic model holds that the major connective between scenes and scenes, events and events in movies is an internal process of questioning and answering.

However, these structures are merely narrative skeletons or armatures which need to be filled in. That is, cinematic scenes, sequences, and events—the things to then be related by processes of repetition or internal questioning/answering—need to be built up and organized. Thus, in order to round out one's theory of narration, one needs a small-scale narrative theory, a theory that accounts for the principles and processes by which film scenes, events, and sequences are coherently composed. This involves us in explaining the ways in which shots are coherently connected with other shots and how the continually shifting views of cinema, as a result of such elements as film editing, can be assimilated by spectators who derive intelligible scenes, sequences, events, and, ultimately, whole stories from the alternating views of the cinematic image flow characteristic of most narrative films and certainly of most mass market movies.

Typically, a narrative film or movie confronts its audience with a flow of images or views which are often fragmentary as well as spatially discon-

tinuous. Shots are compounded with shots taken from different camera positions. These views are built up into actions and events, scenes and sequences which, in turn, are worked into whole stories. This raises questions about the principles of film editing, but, as well, is also related to camera movement, for, as Hitchcock dramatically illustrates in *Rope,* narrative camera movement, in large measure, apes the principles of film editing.

The question of cinematic narration is the question of the small-scale narrative coherence of films; the question of the ways in which events, scenes, and sequences are constructed from shots and alternating views. Verbal language plays an obvious role in this process. But though one would not dare to say that the role of dialogue, intertitles, and commentary in cinematic narration requires no theoretical investigation, an account of the visual elements in cinematic narration seems perhaps more pressing since it is easy, at least speculatively, to imagine that the shifting views of typical films and movies could result in confusion rather than coherence. So this chapter will be primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with cinematic narration as visual narration, and with the ways in which visual narration constructs coherent units from shifting views.

SUTURE

Though the term "suture" is often treated as a generic term for subject positioning, conceived of as a "binding" or stitching" of the subject into a film, the term in film studies arose with reference to answering certain questions about small-scale cinematic narration in relation to the coherence of such editing structures as the shot/reverse shot figure and point-of-view editing. The idea of suture appears to have been introduced into contemporary film theory by Jean-Pierre Oudart, primarily through a discussion of the shot/reverse shot figure.[1] The shot/reverse shot figure typically involves a pair of shots in which each shot represents, "from a more or less oblique angle, one endpoint of an imaginary 180-degree line running through the scenographic space;" as well, film theorists also seem to include, as a variation of the figure, pairs of successive shots that are (counter-field) reverse images of each other, i.e., that cross the aforesaid imaginary 180-degree line.[2] This second variation often occurs in the context of certain types of point-of-view editing, though Oudart, but not his followers, is not centrally concerned with such "subjective" figures.

According to Oudart, when a shot appears on the screen, it is greeted with jubilation. Of course, this very description invokes the mirror stage experience of the wholeness of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the coherence

of the infant's body postulated therein. As contemporary film theorists are quick to point out, with the first of the pair of shots in the shot/reverse shot figure:

> The viewer of the cinematic spectacle experiences shot 1 as an imaginary plenitude, unbounded by any gaze, and unmarked by difference. Shot 1 is thus the site of *jouissance* akin to that of the mirror stage prior to the child's discovery of its separation from the ideal image which it has discovered in the reflecting glass.[3]

However, Oudart believes that shot one also implies an absence, namely the absence of the off-screen space behind the camera, a "fourth side, a field of pure absence."[4] So the initial sense of plenitude gives way to a sense of limitation and Lacanian absence. Daniel Dayan describes this phase thus:

> When the viewer discovers the frame—the first step in reading the film—the triumph of his former *possession* of the image fades out. The viewer discovers the camera is hiding things, and therefore distrusts it and the frame itself which he now understands to be arbitrary. He wonders why the frame itself is what it is. This radically transforms his mode of participation—the unreal space between characters and/or objects is no longer perceived to be pleasurable. It is now the space which separates the camera from the characters. The latter have lost their quality of presence. The spectator discovers that his possession of space was only partial, illusory. He feels dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing. He discovers that he is only authorized to see what happens to be in the axis of the gaze of another spectator who is ghostly or absent.[5]

That is, the initial sense of plenitude of the shot gives way to a sense of absence, an awareness of not only what has been left out by framing but also of the reverse field of the shot, the field in which the viewer of that shot, figuratively speaking, would have been stationed. The viewer in this absent reverse field is called "the absent one." The classical narrative film, however, moves to efface this absence. It does so by manifesting the offscreen reverse field of the absent one of shot one in shot two.

Oudart identifies the absent one with the narrator of the film. It is the narrator's position in regard to shot one that is absent from the image. By supplying that absent perspective in shot two, "the appearance of a lack perceived as a someone (the Absent One) is followed by its abolition by someone (or something) placed within the same field."[6] Thus, the spectator, identifying with the field of view from shot two, fills in for the absent one, thereby suturing the absence or gap created by shot one. David Bordwell writes, summarizing Oudart's position, that:

> Shot/reverse-shot cutting plays down narration by creating the sense that no scenographic space remains unaccounted for. If shot 2 shows that something is "on the other side" of shot 1, there is no place for the narrator to hide.[7]

Indeed, some contemporary film theorists think this suturing operation effaces narration not only by leaving the narrator no place to hide but by inducing the spectator to fill in for the absent one in an act of imaginary identification, which would help account for the transparency of such films—if this is thought to lead the spectator to identify herself as the enunciator. The film generates gaps and absences engendering the spectator's processes of identification to fill them in or suture them. The spectator's sense of identity as a unified subject is appropriated by the film, indeed, stitched or bound into it.

It is important to note that in this account of suture the potential source of incoherence and disruption in the visual flow of narration is the gap provoked by shot one in terms of the implication of the absent one. Coherence and the understanding of the flow of imagery is secured by the operation of the spectator's filling-in activity. The visual narration, in consequence, proceeds seamlessly and without apparent disjunctiveness.

Certain followers of Oudart, in contrast to their mentor, apply the notion of suture specifically to point-of-view editing. There are a variety of types of point-of-view structures, of course. However, for the purposes of illustrating suture, theorists often cite one in which shot one presents a view of an object or character in a way that prompts the audience's eventual, uneasy wonderment about whose view this might be. Shot two then shows us a character who possesses this viewpoint, and with whom the spectator is said to identify. Daniel Dayan appears to be responsible for this application of suture theory to point-of-view editing, and it has been embraced by many contemporary film theorists. Of the effects of the suturing process in regard to point-of-view editing, Annette Kuhn claims:

> the look of the spectator seems to come from a place identical to the source of the look of character A: this appearance is brought about by constructing, through editing, an "eyeline match." The spectator therefore stands in for A, who is of course absent from this shot. When this is followed by . . . (a shot), in which A is once again present to the image, the shot-reverse shot figure is closed and the gap in the spectator's relation with the film is for the moment "sewn up," sutured. Such moments of absence, presence and suture are repeated throughout the film, thus ensuring an ongoing process of subject position in cinematic enunciation.[8]

So, whereas in the account of suture in regard to the shot/reverse shot, the spectator appears to identify with the view from the reverse field,

thereby effacing narration, in the theory of suture in relation to point-of-view editing, the identification is with the look of the character, the net effect of which is also the effacement of narration insofar as the absent one's look has been masked by the conflation of the view of the spectator and the character. However, as in Oudart's account, the problem for the unity and coherence of visual narration that suture solves is the danger that the view of the first shot in the chain is not assigned to a viewer. As well, in terms of abetting the cinematic transparency effect, when the putative subject of the view of the first shot is sutured into the text, it is a misleading one, for it is not the view of the narrator that is signaled, but the view of a misrecognized subject of vision.

As this already suggests, the contemporary film theorist, given the Althusserian-Lacanian framework, is likely to see ideology at work in the process of suturing. Dayan writes:

> What happens in systematic terms is this: the absent one of shot one is an element of the code that is attracted into the message by means of shot two. When shot two replaces shot one, the absent one is transferred from the level of enunciation to the level of fiction [i.e., to a fictional character, the possessor of the point of view]. As a result of this, the code effectively disappears and the ideological effect of the film is thereby secured. The code, which *produces* an imaginary, ideological effect, is hidden by the message. Unable to see the workings of the code, the spectator is at its mercy. His imaginary is sealed into the film: the spectator thus absorbs an ideological effect without being aware of it.[9]

Here the ideological significance of suture appears to be at least twofold. On the one hand, it masks the operation of the narration, thereby enhancing the putative transparency of the film as well as leading to the absorption of the ideological effect which involves the constitution of unified subjects who in this case are sutured and positioned in the film.

If suture theory is restricted to the phenomenon of shot/reverse shot, it will not be able to offer a general account of the intelligibility of visual narration in cinema, for the best available estimates indicate that since the twenties, only 30 to 40 percent of the average film is composed of reverse angle cuts.[10] However, one may argue, as do Stephen Heath and his followers, that though the shot/reverse shot figure and point-of-view editing are particularly illustrative instances of suture, suture is in operation throughout the cinematic narration or the discursive organization of classical film.[11] Framing, the nature of the cinematic image as a simulacrum, narrative ellipses, camera movement, the use of offscreen space and character movement, each entail absences which must be sutured.

This broadened notion of suture, moreover, corresponds with the way in which that notion is used by Lacanian psychoanalysts such as Jacques-Alain Miller, since he thinks of suture as an operation that makes all signification possible.[12] That is, discursive structures, though posing as coherent unities are always marked by difference and require spectators to complete them. Film, as one form of discourse, presents the spectator with structures marked by absences which the spectator fills in, momentarily completing them and, thereby, deriving a sense that the film is coherent, unified, and homogeneous, which qualities, in turn, are appropriated by the subject himself. The film is sutured by binding or positioning the subject in the process of the production of meaning by the film-as-discourse.

Heath writes:

> In its movement, its framings, its cuts, its intermittances, the film ceaselessly poses an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly recaptured for—one needs to say "forin"—the film, that process binding the spectator as subject in the realization of the film's space.
>
> In psychoanalysis, "suture" refers to the relation of the individual as subject to the chain of its discourse where it figures missing in the guise of a stand-in; the subject is an effect of the signifier in which it is represented, stood in for, taken place (the signifier is the narration of the subject). Ideological representation turns on—supports itself from—this "initial" production of the subject in the symbolic order . . . directs it as a set of images and fixed positions, metonymy stopped into fictions of coherence. What must be emphasized, however, is that stopping—the functioning of suture in image, frame, narrative etc.—is exactly a *process:* it counters a productivity, an excess, that it states and restates in the very moment of containing in the interests of coherence—thus the film frame, for example, exceeded from within by the outside it delimits and poses and has ceaselessly to recapture.[13]

Suturing is an element in all discourse. For discourse to be intelligible suturing must occur. In film, discursive structures, including not only shot/reverse shots and point-of-view editing, but the use of offscreen space, ellipses, camera movement, character movement, perspectival images, and representation must be contained by suturing if they are to be coherent. Suturing is supposed to explain how the alternating views of the cinematic images hang together intelligibly and coherently, which phenomenon it attempts to explicate by means of the positioning of the subject. Moreover, suturing must be continual as each discursive structure opens a gap or absence. Each absence appropriates a subject as a condition of its intelligibility and coherence, while each suturing confirms the unified subject position. The coherence of cinematic narration hinges on suturing which reinforces the ideological effect of the subject's positioning.

What strikes one immediately about suture theories, whether Oudart's, Dayan's, or Heath's, is that they are long on explanation and short on cogent evidence. This can be illustrated by reference to Oudart's account. The first shot appears on the screen and is greeted by jubilation, but this feeling gives way to some unease which is assuaged by the appearance of the reverse angle shot. Here at least three different states are being attributed to the spectator. But what behavioral evidence, verbal or otherwise, or even what introspective evidence, is there that the spectator is in any of these states, or that the spectator moves from one of these states to another. The problem here is not that the data have been contaminated by some theory. Rather, the problem is that there are no data; there is merely theory. Yes, there are shot changes. But why suppose that these shot changes correspond to changes in the internal states of the spectator? Before one goes on to theorize about the nature of internal changes in spectators, one should produce some evidence that the spectators are undergoing some sort of transition. That there are changes in the stimulus does not indicate a corresponding change in the spectator, and certainly not such dramatic changes as Oudart advances.

A rational constraint on explanation is that when explanations postulate unobservable changes, these should be correlated with something about the data. Without such constraint, there would be no rational way to decide the difference between explanations that postulate fifty changes in the spectator of a shot/reverse shot exchange and ones that postulate three, forty, a thousand, or none at all. The explanation should not be disconnected from data in such a way that it free wheels in glorious "ad hocery." But that, it would appear, is the case with Oudart's formulation of suture. It offers a scenario of subject stages unconnected to any observable data about spectators. Nor have I been able even to introspect anything like the dialectic of delight and dejection Oudart hypothesizes in relation to shot/reverse shots. And though their accounts at points differ from Oudart's, Dayan's and Heath's are also singularly uninformative concerning the data that ground the complex psychic gyrations they postulate.

Another way to get at this objection is to note that an explanation is unpersuasive insofar as its explanatory machinery—here, changes in the internal states of subjects—totally outweighs the evidence the explanation purportedly organizes. If a formulation is all explanation and proposes little or no evidence, then we have good reason to reject it. But the suturing theories we have reviewed are exactly of this sort; they are complex running stories, perhaps better called myths, of successive changes in the intrapsychic states of the spectator, but these changes have nothing to do with any evidence, external or even introspective, about concrete spectators.

When linguists theorize about the grammaticality of sentences, they do so on the basis of reports of competant native speakers. But there is no corresponding restraint on cinematic suture theories. One might think that the evidence might be easy to secure. One could legitimately speculate that if we showed normal spectators something like Warhol's *Empire,* an eight-hour "shot" with no counter shot, the average audience would become uneasy. Probably so. But this would not give us the kind of evidence that Oudart needs unless we could eliminate such countervailing hypotheses as that it was the duration and/or the paucity of psychologically significant content, and not the lack of a counter-shot, that causes the uneasiness with regard to *Empire.* Ex hypothesi, I see no reason to think that one cannot arrange a row of shots without reverse shots to which audiences will respond without indications of unease, aggravation, boredom, or whatever other behavioral evidence the suture theorist would like to correlate with his theory.

This particular proposed experiment, if it can be sustained, of course, would only cut against Oudart's and probably Dayan's versions of suture theory, but not Heath's. For Heath contends that suturing is going on even without counter-shots and the character's point-of-view shot. But this is no theoretical advantage because it only makes it harder to imagine how evidence could be adduced to support the theory.

This problem, of the lack of connection between theory and evidence, is not merely a feature of suture theory but a disturbing proclivity of many facets of contemporary film theory. Consider this account of the child's entry into language which Colin MacCabe derives from Luce Irigaray and which is obviously related to suturing:

> In the development of the child there is a moment when the infant (*infans:* unable to speak) enters language. In this process of entry, he/she becomes aware of certain places which he/she as subject can occupy—these are the points of insertion into language. Crucially this involves the learning of pronouns: the realization that the "you" with which the child is addressed by the father or mother can be permutated with the "I" in a situation from which it is excluded—when the parents speak to each other. This realisation is the understanding that the "you" with which he or she is addressed can be permutated with a "he" or "she," which is the possibility that the proper name is articulated in a set of differences—and that the child is only a signifier constantly defined and redefined by a set of substitution relations. The binary I/you is transformed from two terms into a relational structure by the passage through the empty place of the "he" or "she" and it is through the experience of this empty place that the child enters language.[14]

Two things are apparent immediately about this account. First, it is

almost exclusively metaphorical; grammatical functions get redescribed spatially, so that entering language, which might be more literally called acquiring pronominal reference, is "explained" as if it were a matter of crawling into an empty space, which is something MacCabe somehow knows is the way infants regard pronouns. This mode of explanation by means of a pastiche of puns and equivocations is, of course, the hallmark of contemporary film theory.

However, MacCabe's account, like the suture theories above, also shows a remarkable obliviousness to any canons of evidence. Basically his explanation is a long, rambling story, with lots of asides about the intrapsychic changes the infant undergoes, which include little or no reference to data or changes in the data which would correspond at the observation level as grounds for postulating the various sequences within the event-series of the child's maturation as charted by the explanation. The explanation is a story or narrative, but a narrative whose changes of events are not really correlated to any reported observations of changes in the child's behavior, save the acquisition of pronominal reference. But the mere acquisition of pronominal reference hardly compels acceptance of the details of the involuted intrapsychic saga MacCabe wants to tell. Contrast MacCabe's way of explaining child development with the rich citation of observation and detail one finds in Piaget's theories. MacCabe's theory adduces no behavioral evidence to ground the details of the abstract operations and goings-on that comprise his story. Of course, similar problems beset the discussion of the mirror stage. And since the mirror stage and the entry into language are both prototypical of suturing, it should be no surprise that suture theory flies untethered by evidence.[15]

Returning directly to the problems with suture theory, one is struck by the fact that though suture theory is supposed to tell us how it is that cinematic narration and its discursive organizations are coherent it says nothing explicit about the ways in which the discursive structures of cinema address cognition. Suture theory is about the way the organism deals with absences. But surely there must be more to assimilating a cinematic message than an intimation of absence followed by a feeling of wholeness (and so on and so on). That is, for example, by what means does the spectator ***understand*** that this close-up of a piece of fruit represents the piece of fruit in the medium shot of the table that follows it. Even if it is true that the close-up of the piece of fruit engenders an intimation of absence, which is sutured by the shot of the table, how is the understanding of the reference of shots and their interrelation—the understanding of their coherence (if you will)—explained by suture.

Presumably, the Lacanian will want to say something like the operation of the faculty of the Symbolic does the cognitive work about which I am asking. This faculty, however, operates in such a way that along with deciphering languages, in the broad sense of "language," it also inevitably causes an intimation of absence which must be sutured. So a consequence of the cognitive processing of the images would be the potential disruption of understanding by absence, and suturing explains the way which this disruption is buffered. But note we still have not been told how the image-flow is understood, but rather how the process of understanding—conceived as cognitive processing—has not auto-destructed. That is, we have not learned the means by which the images have been rendered coherent, but rather only how the work of cognition does not emotionally befuddle itself by raising the specter of absence.

We may, of course, doubt that the play of absence and wholeness in fact subtends every reception of discourse, including cinematic discourse. This would return us to the question of evidence. What data motivates us to postulate the feeling of absence and its consequent suturing? Moreover, might it not be the case that if the cognitive process of understanding were specified by contemporary film theorists, there would be no reason to hypothesize further operations like suturing?

In criticizing Oudart, David Bordwell interprets Oudart's theory of suture as an attempt to characterize "the viewing activities that the spectator often engages in—anticipation, recollection, and recognition of the spaces which narration presents."[16] However, Bordwell argues that there are perfectly plausible, alternative hypotheses to the invocation of the unconscious Absent One by which we may organize the relevant spectator activities. Bordwell himself favors an account which presupposes the existence of spatial, temporal, and logical schemata which a spectator antecedently possesses and uses to test the visual array for intelligibility.

Whether or not Bordwell's positive account is correct, several things about it are significant. First, unlike the suture theorist, Bordwell proceeds with the understanding that a theory is advanced in competition with other theories. He can defend the relative superiority of his theory over suture theory on several counts: it does not postulate the existence of exotic entities like the absent one and it respects an important methodological constraint on psychoanalytic theorizing, viz., it attempts to find a rational account of the image processing before resorting to an irrationalist hypothesis. Bordwell does have to postulate schemata, though that hypothesis can be defended by its theoretical usefulness for contemporary cognitive psychologists. And, of course, by using a hypothesis shared with cognitive

psychology, Bordwell brings his theory of film cognition closer to that of ordinary cognition which would appear to represent a gain in theoretical simplicity. Indeed, in terms of simplicity, since most contemporary film theorists, given their semiotic orientation, probably already accept the existence of schemata, along with suture, Bordwell's theory is more elegant since he need only hypothesize schemata. Bordwell can explain with schemata what contemporary film theorists try to explain with reference to schemata ***and*** the absent one. Moreover, if one can adequately explain the phenomenon with reference to schemata, or some other cognitive process, there seems to be little reason to add further theoretical entities to the story, since the story has already been told. Or, recalling Wittgenstein, a wheel that turns no other parts is not part of the mechanism.

The neglect of cognitive-perceptual psychology in contemporary suture theory is extremely troublesome.[17] Part of the aim of suture theory is to explain the way in which spectators make sense out of films. An obvious source for explanation or explanatory frameworks of the way that subjects comprehend stimuli is cognitive psychology. But most contemporary film theorists (with exceptions like Bill Nichols) attempt to do the whole work of explaining the spectator's apprehension of coherence within the framework of psychoanalysis. Why, generally, are no cognitive or perceptual structures explicitly included in the suture model of film reception when it seems so painfully clear that some such mechanisms must come into play when audiences recognize a given film to be coherent? If contemporary theorists believe that the type of structures hypothesized by cognitive and perceptual psychology are inadequate to the task at hand, they should at the very least say why.

There is, moreover, an important consideration of method here. Scientific theories vindicate themselves through competition with other scientific theories, and the way to argue for a new scientific theory is to show that it is superior to all other competing explanations. Freud, fully realizing this, introduced *The Interpretation of Dreams* with an exhaustive refutation of previous dream theories. One accepts Freud's theory and one allows him to postulate certain theoretical, unobservable processes because he has demonstrated that his theory explains the data better than competing theories. Contemporary film theorists do not confront competing cognitive-psychological explanations of the way film spectators recognize screen stimuli to be coherent. The suture theorist does not scientifically demonstrate that the operations he postulates are warranted since he has not shown that we cannot get better explanations from research in cognitive psychology.

It is also helpful to remark that with psychoanalysis it does not seem

advisable to postulate the operation of an unconscious mechanism, as in the case of parapraxis, unless there is a breakdown in a cognitive (or organic) mechanism which cannot be accounted for except by postulating an irrational mechanism. That is, something irregular has to compel the inference of unconscious agency. This seems to me to be a methodologically sound constraint if only because the irrational mechanism will perforce be less familiar, more a matter of speculative extrapolation than a cognitive processing mechanism. And, of course, given what defines the object of psychoanalytic investigation, there is really nothing to explain by means of the unconscious mechanism, by reference to the irrational, until rationality has broken down. However, it seems peculiar to think that rationality has broken down when one recognizes the coherence of a chain of shots in a movie. Recognizing coherence in such a case is the epitome of regular, normal, rational behavior.

The indeterminateness, contradictoriness, unpredictability, and arbitrariness imputed to irrational structures supply at least one group of considerations that make them epistemologically hazardous processes to postulate. One should not rush to postulate unconscious processes. One should attempt to exhaust other possible, logically determinate explanations first. I am not saying that the unconscious should be foresworn as an explanatory device, but rather that we should hypothesize unconscious operations only after we have exhausted other avenues. Suture theorists, however, do not wait to see whether cognitive models might explain the kinds of coherences that interest them. This is as intemperate as starting to explain how I know to answer "twelve" when you ask me "How much is six plus six" by reference to my psychosexual development. Similarly, the apprehension or recognition of the coherence of a string of shots can be, it seems to me, explained thoroughly as a piece of rational behavior without reference to unconscious operations.

Moreover, there are deep reasons for the type of methodological constraints advanced above. Psychoanalytic theory was designed to explicate the irrational. As pointed out in an earlier chapter, the general paresis and epileptic fits due to injury to Broca's area in the brain are *non*rational and obviously not appropriate subjects for psychoanalytic inquiry. Similarly, I think that when an agent does something that is rational, we have no prima facie reason to investigate further into the causes of his actions. That is, a methodological constraint on psychoanalytic explanation, one which defines the domain of psychoanalysis, is that it not be mobilized until there is an identifiable disruption of rationality. Not all beliefs and behaviors, not all social, aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive responses are candidates for

psychoanalytic investigation. Insofar as psychoanalysis is designed to conceptualize irrational behavior, which is only identifiable as a deviation from some norm of rational behavior, there is no work for it to do where the behavior in question is of an *unmistakably* rational sort. Furthermore, it does not seem to me that understanding movies is either irrational or involved in the engagement of irrational processes.

The identification of the irrational is logically dependent upon the rational. Consequently, it is necessary to establish a deviation of the rational before resorting to the irrational. Thus, psychoanalysis has no role to play except in such cases as inexplicable deviations from the norm of rationality occur which are not attributable to organic causes. The restriction of psychoanalysis to irrational phenomena follows from the logically dependent or parisitic relation that the irrational bears to the rational.

Moreover, the basic concepts of psychoanalysis are metaphoric extensions of the concepts of the rational—e.g., motive, intention, wish, drive, need, and so on. That is, the concepts are all purposive, or ends' seeking. The difference is that these forces are conscious and perform roles in deliberation in rationalist psychology, but they are metaphorically extended to unconscious forces in psychoanalysis where intrapsychic entities perform them. Psychoanalysis, by examining unconscious intentions and repressed operations, explains actions, purposively characterized, that cannot be explained by conscious or merely tacit intentions, beliefs, and reasonings. Psychoanalysis, so to speak, takes over when purposes, intentions, beliefs, and so on go underground, but it nevertheless continues to explain behavior in terms of unconscious beliefs and intentions that are understood in terms of an organism in pursuit of ends and goals. Thus, when we have an adequate explanation available in virtue of rational goals and ends, there is no reason to postulate further unconscious goals and ends.

Of course, another way to make this point would be to note that psychoanalysis is not an explanation of all human behavior, but only of certain aspects of human behavior. There is no reason to suppose that the kinds of questions pursued by cognitive psychologists will be found by psychoanalysis. The suture theorist should not presume that an explanation of the ways in which a spectator apprehends the coherence of a shot chain is a matter about which psychoanalysis has anything useful to say.

It may be that the suture theorist believes not that cognitive models for understanding shot chains and movies are incorrect but that they will ultimately complement the Lacanian model. Thus, the suture theorist does not explore cognitive-perceptual frameworks for explaining the comprehension of the flow of cinematic images because he believes that these

models will only enrich the fundamental suture description that he gives with more (rather than competing) details. But this approach raises an epistemological problem. For how does the suture theorist know that cognitive mechanisms alone cannot fully account for the way spectators come to see cinematic spectacles as coherent? That is, how can the suture theorist rest assured that, once we have an account of cinematic coherence in terms of cognitive mechanism, talk of suture will be extraneous or beside the point? What suture theory gropes to explain abstractly, cognitive psychology might explain concretely, without reference to almost mystical concepts like the "absent one."

Previously it was noted that though suture theory was initially introduced to conceptualize the spectator's assimilation of the shot/reverse shot figure and point-of-view editing, the application of the notion of suture was extended to every device and convention of film. Once suturing is regarded as an attribute of everything that is coherent in film, however, the theory offers little insight at the level of structure and pragmatics into the workings and differentiation of specific cinematic devices and conventions. Suture theory seems less concerned with exactly how—logically, rhetorically, and structurally—film devices make (or appear to make) sense (communicate meaning), and more concerned with the fact that they do make sense. That a particular device sutures is the conclusion of each explanation. Since suture is a general account of what makes coherence possible, it merely tells us how every film device and practice is the same—they all suture; they appear to make sense by masking an absence and binding a subject.

Some specificity seems required in suture explanations when the analyst names the particular absences incurred by a given device, and when the analyst outlines the way in which the device poses its appearance of completeness, wholeness, and homogeneity. But this is not a really compelling degree of specificity, because (1) the absences denominated are fairly routine; and (2) the structural descriptions of the device's coherence involve the same key words—*center, position, bind,* and the rest of the Lacanian litany—for whatever device is under examination. Thus, suture theory gives almost the same account for every cinematic device and practice. Some limited ingenuity may be required to blend Lacanian terms into these descriptions, but once this is done, the explanation converges on the same Lacanian subject-in-language myth. Film theory seems to dissolve into showing how every question about cinema and cinematic devices can be given the same (ultimate) answer which, as well, is the same answer given by Lacanian theory in its explorations of linguistics and culture at large.

However, the generality and abstractness of such suture explanations leave unanswered the specific film theoretical questions that we might ask about, for example, the different potential uses of the close-up.

The suture theorist may say that the above objection is grounded in a misconception of what film theory should be. Such a theorist might say that what has been gained by suture theory is a bridge between film theory and the theory of the subject and of ideology in general. We should put aside the remaining questions of film theory as unimportant and be happy that we now have a formula—the suture scenario—that tells us about the inner spring that powers everything. But the remaining questions of film theory—such as what are the different types of camera movement and what underlying principles interrelate them?—will not disappear when we are told that camera movements suture subjects. People who make, study, teach, and otherwise strive to understand film will still require answers to the mundane questions of film theory, despite their acquisition, via suture theory, of the ontology of the subject.

Indeed, oddly enough, the suture theory of film, when extended to every cinematic coherence-making device, seems to require the existence of ordinary film theory in order to isolate the coherence-making structures of film and to supply the basic account of those devices upon which the suture account is then grafted. That is, the suture theorist explains the way in which a device works—say offscreen sound—in the manner an ordinary film theorist might and then goes on to conclude that in virtue of the coherence just described the device sutures. One must ask whether suture theory, in this regard, is an addition to or a parasite upon the structural and rhetorical analyses of ordinary film theory? Or, to put the matter slightly differently, does suture theory add anything to ordinary film theory or, again, is suture a wheel that turns nothing?

If suture theory is threadbare as film theory, it is also impoverished as a putative scientific theory. Scientific theories are aimed at explaining *specific* variations in phenomena. But expanded versions of suture theory, in claiming that all discourse, including all film discourse, is to be explained in terms of suture, is rather like the theory that God makes everything happen. I ask why the flower died, the brakes jammed, and the sun rose, and I am told that in each case "God made it happen." I soon see that this kind of answer is going to get me nowhere in understanding the phenomenon at issue, and I search for answers in terms of the more restricted fields of biology, automechanics, and astronomy. Similarly, if I ask what makes a simple declarative sentence coherent, an offscreen sound intelligible, and a structuralist materialist film comprehensible, and I am told in each case that suture made

it happen, then I begin to suspect that the answer is more general than the question with which I am concerned.

In order to avoid vacuity, a theory must not only explain why x is the case but also under what circumstances x would not be the case. If I attempted to explain both why a certain flower would live and why it would die by saying that "God wills it," then my explanation would be vacuous. A scientific theory must not only explain how such and such a state of affairs came about but also how things might have been otherwise had the relevant conditions been otherwise. However, it is not clear that expanded versions of suture theory meet this requirement. For example, Stephen Heath applies the concept of suturing not only to Hollywood films but to more subversive works such as *News from Home* as well as to structuralist-materialist films. Hollywood films suture but so do attempts to transgress the forms and conventions of narrative film. The structuralist-materialist, avant-garde filmmaker's attempt to subvert suture is said to result in a special intensity of meaning. There seems to be nothing an avant-garde filmmaker can do to achieve a condition of nonsuture. Every cinematic articulation is explained by means of the idea of suture. But a theory that explains everything, explains nothing.

So far we have raised theoretical questions concerning the very notion of suture, construed both narrowly and broadly. We have not dealt with certain of the ideological consequences that are thought to follow from suture by contemporary film theorists, viz., that suture abets the illusion of transparency of films and that it confirms the sense of subject unity that the Althusserian-Lacanian finds so suspect. Of course, if the very notion of suture is questionable, it is doubtful whether these ideological consequences can flow from it. However, we have also considered, in previous chapters, reasons for disbelieving whether these two putative ideological effects of film are warranted.

We have pointed out that the notion that a movie appears transparent by persuading the spectator that she is its enunciator is implausible. Via suture theory, this is supposedly explained in terms of the spectator, in various ways, identifying with the absent one. But we have seen that there may be no theoretical justification for postulating the absent one, and, therefore, no reason to suspect that anyone identifies with it. Similarly, we have previously shown that there is no ground for thinking that spectators believe they are the enunciator of the film, so we need not hypothesize suture as the means by which this is accomplished.

Presumably, suture abets the ideological operation of transparency by encouraging the spectator's apprehension of herself as the enunciator of the

movie. Thus, the spectator would, I suppose, accept whatever ideological views the film proposes as her own. Or, if the spectator has identified with a character rather than the enunciator, the narrator is still thought to be hidden in such a way that the spectator is unaware that the film's representation of events is controlled by the ideological interests of the enunciator.

However, we have seen that there is not only little reason to think that these various identifications are really occurring, but, as well, little reason to think that spectators believe that films lack narrators. If a spectator agrees with the ideological position of a film, he may not attend to the way in which the enunciator has distorted the subject material. But this has nothing to do with the purported, quasi-formalist effects of enunciation and suturing but rather is connected to the social conditioning of the spectator. And, of course, where the spectator does not agree with the ideological position of the film, he or she can be quite aware of the controlling distortions of the filmmaker, despite the supposed facts that the operation of suturing and masked enunciation should render this improbable.

The second ideological repercussion of suturing is, of course, the way in which it reinforces the spectator's faith in subject unity. We have had occasion to question both the Althusserian connection between subject unity and ideology, and the Lacanian account of imaginary identification. If those objections carry the day, then the proposed political consequences of suture for subject unity can be rejected. At the same time, we may be skeptical as to whether the connection between identification in suturing with respect to the flow of cinematic images and the process of imaginary identification relevant to Althusserian-Lacanian subject unity is anything more than verbal. According to some suture theorists, a perspectivally organized film image might be said to suture me by inducing an identification with the camera such that I am positioned as a unified subject, misrecognizing myself as the enunciator of the shot. Thus, I am positioned as a unified subject in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense. But, as has been pointed out more than once already, the way in which I am positioned by such shots, if it is appropriate to speak of positioning here, is spatial, whereas the kind of positioning relevant to the Althusserian-Lacanian brief is a metaphor that pertains to a social position. However there is no reason, save equivocation, to think that a spatial position and a social position have anything to do with each other.

Indeed, the whole vocabulary of suture theory seems based upon metaphorical confusions. Suture binds gaps, stitches ruptures, closes absences. In virtue of this it is said to render the cinematic array coherent. But

"coherence" here must mean something like without gaps or a sense of wholeness. However, this is not the sense of "coherence" one has in mind when thinking about intelligibility. Being intelligible or coherent to the understanding has nothing to do with whether or not a communication has gaps; I can easily understand an enthymeme, i.e., discern that it makes sense, though something is missing. What the suture theorist appears to have done is to move from a process of finding something coherent, in the sense of "whole," to a claim that this explains the way in which the spectator finds the cinematic array coherent in the sense of being intelligible. Thus, suturing is proposed as a means by which one makes sense out of cinematic arrays when in fact the coherence secured is rather that of a sense of *wholeness*. Thus, even if there is such a process as suturing, which is a rather large *if*, we might be skeptical about whether it tells us anything about how cinematic arrays make sense. For the connection between coherence as wholeness and coherence as intelligibility appears to ride merely upon an ambiguity in terminology.

AN ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNT OF CINEMATIC NARRATION

The flow of imagery in narrative films and popular movies is characteristically fragmentary, a series of alternating views from varying camera positions. But in the case of movies—as opposed to art films and experimental films—ordinary spectators typically have no problem following the narrative embodied in the fragmentary stream of images. Though one might think that the discontinuities in the image track would make it incoherent, ordinary viewers standardly have no difficulty in finding visual movie narration coherent and intelligible. One proposed way to understand this is suture theory. But, as we have seen, this is a highly implausible approach. So an alternative account of how the spectator follows the flow of visual imagery in the cinematic narration of movies is called for.

Though the fragmentary flow of imagery in movies might make it seem that movies would be difficult to follow, movies are in fact quite easy to follow. In fact, movies, the popular films of Hollywood International, are, it would seem, easier to follow than plays as they are standardly presented, even though the scenes within plays are typically continuous in terms of their space, scale, and the angle from which we view their action. Thus, one way to approach the question of the coherence of the movie image track is to contrast it with the theatrical image in order to isolate the standard features of movies that differentiate them from the standard presentation of

plays in such a way that typical movies are more accessible than typical theatrical performances. Our guiding hypothesis here is that due to certain cinematic devices, which structure the cinematic image track and which were developed early in the evolution of movies, the typical movie narrative is more accessible than the typical play. That is, a movie narrative appears easier to follow than a play. Moreover, if we can explain why this is so, we should be on our way to isolating the features of the cinematic image track that facilitate the spectator's reception of the flow of movie imagery as a coherent story.

We have claimed that the typical movie, all things being equal, is more accessible or easier to follow than the typical play, i.e., theatrical performances as they are *commonly* encountered. The caveat, "commonly," is added, of course, because there is no reason to believe that theatrical devices that would be functionally equivalent to the movie devices about to be discussed could not be invented, thus changing the relative accessibility and easy coherence of typical movies versus typical plays.

We have asserted that movies are easier to follow than plays. What is it that is distinctive about the way in which spectators follow movies? With the typical movie, given certain of its characteristic devices, notably variable framing, the movie viewer is generally in a position where he or she is attending to exactly what is significant in the action-array or spectacle on screen. Another way of getting at this is to say that the filmmaker in popular movies has far more potential control over the spectator's attention than does the theatrical director. A crucial consequence of this is that the movie spectator is always looking where he or she should be looking, always attending to the right details and thereby comprehending, nearly effortlessly, the ongoing action precisely in the way it is meant to be understood. Various cinematic devices, particularly variable framing, make movies easier to follow and, therefore, more accessible than theatrical productions because movie narratives are more perspicuous cognitively. And, as we shall see, the cognitive clarity of movies may not only help account for their accessibility but also for the special intensity of engagement and response that movies elicit.

Of course, movies and standard theatrical productions share many of the same devices for directing the audience's attention. Both in the medium-long shot in movies and the proscenium stage in theater, the audience's attention can be guided by: the central positioning of an important character; movement in stasis; stasis in movement; characters' eyelines; light colors on dark fields; dark colors on light fields; sound, notably dialogue; spotlighting and variable illumination of the array; placement of important

objects or characters along arresting diagonals; economy of set details; makeup and costume; commentary; gestures; and so on. But movies appear to have further devices and perhaps more effective devices for directing attention than does theater as it is standardly practiced.

The variability of focus in film, for example, is generally a more reliable means of making sure that the audience is looking where the spectator "ought" to be looking than is theatrical lighting. But even more important is the use in movies of variable framing. Through cutting and camera movement, the filmmaker can rest assured that the spectator is perceiving exactly what she should be perceiving at the precise moment she should be perceiving it. When a camera comes in for a close-up, for example, there is no possibility that the spectator can be distracted by some detail stage left. Everything extraneous to the story at that point is deleted. Nor does the spectator have to find the significant detail; it is delivered to her. The viewer also gets as close or as far-off a view of the significant objects of the story—be they heroines, butcher knives, mobs, fortresses, or planets—as is useful for her to have a concrete sense of what is going on.

Whereas in a theater the eye constantly tracks the action—often at a felt distance, often amidst a vaulting space—in movies much of that work is done by shifting camera positions, which, at the same time, also assure that the average viewer has not got lost in the space but is looking precisely at that which she is supposed to see. Movies are therefore easier to follow than typical stage productions, because the shifting camera positions make it practically impossible for the movie viewer *not* to be attending where she is meant to attend. And, of course, the virtually unavoidable clarity of the movie narrative in respect to the potentially impeccable direction of attention is a major constituent of the coherence of movies for spectators.

Variable framing in film is achieved by moving the camera closer or farther away from the objects being filmed. Cutting and camera movement are the two major processes for shifting the frame: in the former, the actual process of the camera's change of position is not included in the shot; we jump from medium-range views, to close views, to far-off views with the traversal of the space between excised. In camera movement, as the name suggests, the passage of the camera from a long view to a close view, or vice versa, is recorded within the shot. Reframing can also be achieved optically through such devices as zooming-in and changing lenses.

These mechanical means for changing the framing of an onscreen object or event give rise to three formal devices for directing the movie audience's attention: indexing, bracketing, and scaling. Indexing occurs when a camera is moved toward an object. The motion toward the object functions

ostensively, like the gesture of pointing. It indicates that the viewer ought to be looking in the direction toward which the camera is moving, if the camera's movement is being recorded, or in the direction toward which the camera is aimed or pointing, if we have been presented with the shot via a cut.

When a camera is moved toward an array, it screens out everything beyond the frame. To move a camera toward an object, either by cutting or camera movement generally, has the force of indicating that what is important at this moment is what is on screen, what is in the perimeter of the frame. That which is not inside the frame has been ***bracketed,*** excluded. It should not, and in fact it literally cannot, at the moment it is bracketed, be attended to. At the same time, bracketing has an inclusionary dimension, indicating that what is inside the frame or bracket is important. A standard camera position will mobilize both the exclusionary and inclusionary dimensions of the bracket to control attention, though the relative degree may vary as to whether a given bracket is more important for what it excludes, rather than what it includes, and vice versa.

There is also a standard deviation from this use of bracketing. Often the important element of a scene is placed outside the frame so that it is not visible onscreen, e.g., the child killer in the early part of Fritz Lang's *M*. Such scenes derive a great deal of their expressive power just because they subvert the standard function of bracketing.

As the camera is moved forward, it not only indexes and places brackets around the objects in front of it, it also changes their scale. Whether by cutting or camera movement, as the camera nears the gun on the table, the gun simultaneously appears larger and occupies more screen space. When the camera is pulled away from the table the gun occupies less screen space. This capacity to change the scale of objects through camera positioning—a process we call scaling—can be exploited for expressive or magical effects. But scaling is also a lever for the direction of audience attention. Enlarging the screen size of an object generally has the force of indicating that this object, or gestalt of objects, is the important item to attend to at this moment in the movie.

Scaling, bracketing, and indexing are three different ways of directing the movie spectator's attention through camera positioning. In general, a standard camera positioning, whether executed by cutting or camera movement, will employ all three of these means. But one can easily think of scenes in which the bracket is reoriented, but the scaling stays effectively the same—for example, a lateral pan as a character walks toward the edge of the frame. Likewise, a camera movement might be important for what it indexes rather than for whatever changes occur in the bracketing or the

scaling; there are moving shots in the early Italian film *Cabiria,* for example, where the camera nudges a few feet forward in a spectacle scene in order to point the viewer's eye in a certain direction, though neither the bracket nor the scale of the objects in the scene are changed appreciably. Both the swamp scene and the trolley-car scene in *Sunrise* are artistically important for the way in which they call attention to the bracket, rather than for their scaling or indexing.

However, bracketing, scaling, and indexing can be employed in tandem, and when they are, they afford very powerful means by which the moviemaker controls the audience's attention. We suddenly see a medium shot in which the gun is being pointed at the heroine by the villain, telling us, in effect, that now the important thing about the gun is its role within this newly framed context or gestalt. The constant reframing of the action that is endemic to movies enables the spectator to follow the action perfectly, and, so to say, automatically.

It may seem strange to some readers that I am treating the variable framing due to editing and that due to camera movement in much the same way. Of course, I readily admit that editing and camera movement are different in many respects. However, in their use of the frame for narrative purposes they appear to exploit the same formal potentials of reframing. Perhaps this claim can be rendered somewhat more convincing by a historical conjecture. The perfecting and wide dissemination of narrative camera movement, in such films as *Regeneration, The Vagabond,* and finally *The Last Laugh,* appears to develop after the popularization of film editing with its routine alternation of close views, medium views, and far views. One suspects it develops in imitation of editing. Of course, there has been camera movement since the earliest days of film. Lumière's cinematographers mounted their cameras on boats floating down the Nile, and, as well, early on, cameras were stationed in fast moving cars to keep track of hurtling action scenes—trains speeding ahead, cowboys on horseback riding to the rescue, and slapstick comics and Keystone Cops racing in progressively deteriorating jalopies. But the use of camera movement to pick out and focus, and to recontextualize narrative detail emerges, albeit quite rapidly, after editing, receiving its inspiration, one may speculate, from the clarification of the means for controlling attention via film editing. That is, indexing, scaling, and bracketing seem to have been mastered first in film editing which opened the way for narrative reframing via camera movement. Thus, if this account is correct, it should come as no surprise that in terms of the use of the frame for directing narrative attention, editing and camera movement exploit the same functions.

Needless to say, our account of variable framing is only meant as an

account of its operation with respect to its direction of the spectator's attention to the details of the ongoing story. This is not an account of every aspect of variable framing. Variable framing also can perform a range of expressive functions. The speed of editing or of camera movement, or the distances traversed from view to view, can invest the scene portrayed with expressive or aesthetic qualities. For example, a large, slow camera movement may strike us as stately, while a brace of short shots of different, spatially quite disparate, locales may project feelings of nervousness or excitement. Thus, by emphasizing the service variable framing performs in the direction of the spectator's attention to the narration, we in no way deny that variable framing is involved in further functions. Nor, moreover, do we claim that variable framing is the only means for the direction of cinematic attention, but only that it is very central.

Returning to our contrast between movies and theatrical performances, we can note that adaptations of stage technology might be available that would provide theatrical means that would be functionally equivalent to the scaling, bracketing, and indexing functions of variable framing in movies. Magnifying mirrors might be used to enlarge stage details at appropriate moments; the leg curtains could be motorized to constantly reframe the action; and indexing might be approximated by the use of revolving stages that rotate the important characters and actions toward the audience. If these devices were not too distracting in and of themselves, they might supply the theater director with attentional levers that are functionally equivalent to scaling, bracketing, and indexing. However, these devices are not customary in theater as we know it, and the putatively greater, cognitive accessibility of movies in contrast to theater seems explicable in terms of the potentials that variable framing affords for the direction of attention.

Of course, *films* can be made without variable framing; but *movies,* popular mass market narratives, rely on variable framing to automatize the spectator's attention. Also, variable framing is not unique to the movies; other types of film—including art films and experimental films—employ it. Yet variable framing is key to why movies are accessible—to why movies appear to be almost automatically coherent and intelligible. The variable framing insures that the spectator is always attending to the details and configurations that, for the purposes of the story, are appropriate; variable framing virtually guarantees that the spectator is attending where and when she should.

So far we have concentrated upon the way in which variable framing—one of the central visual devices of cinematic narration—serves to render the ongoing story in a movie intelligible, almost automatically. But perhaps

the consideration of variable framing can also contribute to our understanding of the incredible impact that mass market movies as a form appear to have on audiences.

As already noted, through variable framing, the movie director assures that the spectator is attending when and where she should. The action and its details unfold in such a way that every element that is relevant is displayed at a distance that makes it eminently recognizable and in a sequence that is intelligible. Ideally, variable framing allows us to see just what we need to see at changing distances and at cadences that render the action perspicuous. The action is broken down into its most salient elements, distilled, that is, in a way that makes it extremely legible.

This kind of clarity, which is bequeathed to the audience automatically by variable framing, contrasts strongly with the depiction of action in theatrical representations. There, depiction is not analytic but a matter of physical enactment, generally occurring in something approximating real time, and presented at a fixed distance to each viewer. Of course, theatrical action is abstracted, simplified, for the sake of legibility, often employing emblematic gestures. It is clearer, that is, than the actions we encounter in everyday life. But theatrical action is not as clear and analytically distinct as movie action as portrayed by variable framing.

Movie action, given the way it can be organized through camera positioning, is also far more intelligible than the unstaged events we witness in everyday life. This is an important feature of movies which helps to account for the way in which movies grip us.

Our experiences of actions and events in movies differ radically from our normal experiences; movie actions and events are so organized, so automatically intelligible, and so clear. The arresting thing about movies, *contra* various realist theories, is not that they create the illusion or impression of reality, but that they reorganize and construct, through variable framing, actions and events with an economy, legibility, and coherence that are not only automatically available, but which surpass, in terms of their immediately perceptible basic structure, naturally encountered actions and events. Movie actions evince a visible order to a degree not found in everyday experience. This quality of extraordinary, uncluttered clarity gratifies the mind's quest for order, thereby intensifying our engagement with the screen. That is, along with partially explaining the way in which cinematic narration is coherent, variable framing can also contribute to an account of the powerful impression that movies impart to spectators, which impression is of interest to contemporary film theorists such as Baudry.

We have discussed the visual devices of movies in terms of the type of clarity they afford the audience—in terms of how they enable the audience

to see all that it is relevant for them to see at the appropriate distance and in the appropriate sequence. At the same time, in the chapter prior to this one, another sort of clarity has been attributed to the type of large-scale narrative structure that we identified as central to movies, i.e., to the erotetic narrative. How, one might wonder, do these two "clarities"—of variable framing and erotectic narration—relate to each other? Well, generally, in movies, devices such as scaling, bracketing, and indexing will be employed so that *the first item or the first gestalt of items that the audience is led to attend to in a given shot is the item or gestalt that is most relevant to the progress of the narrative—i.e., to the posing, sustaining, or answering of those questions the movie elects to answer.* The importance of variable framing for movies is the potential it affords for assuring that the audience attends to everything that is *relevant,* and that it does so automatically, so to speak. "Relevance" is here determined by the narrative, or, more specifically, by the questions and answers that drive the narrative, which in turn are saliently posed and answered in important ways by means of variable framing.

Variable framing, along with the sorts of devices enumerated earlier for directing attention in the single, medium shot, are the filmmaker's means of visual narration. They enable her to raise questions *visually:* the question "Will Jones be shot?" can be "posed" by focusing on a close-up of a gun. At the same time, the visual depiction of an action can either sustain or answer a question. "Will Eli Wallach die by hanging?" can be sustained by showing him teetering on a chair with a noose around his neck, or answered by showing us Clint Eastwood severing the rope in an act of superhuman marksmanship. Of course, many of the pressing questions that drive movies forward are not primarily set forth visually but are stated explicitly in the dialogue, or are already implied in the scripting of the action. Nevertheless, the devices of visual narration, if not the original source of the questions, help make those questions salient.

The large-scale narrative coherence of movies derives from the erotetic structure. The questions the film internally pose structure, broadly speaking, the audience's expectations, roughly circumscribing their horizon of alternative possibilities in a way that prepares the audience for what will happen. The small-scale visual narration in movies resides in devices such as, most importantly, variable framing as well as various strategies for directing attention internal to the single shot (e.g., placing the most important element in the center of the image). Moreover, these systems of large-scale movie narration and small-scale visual narration are coordinated by the principle that the first thing the audience sees in a shot is that which is most relevant to posing, sustaining, or answering the questions of the ongoing story.

While in general it is true that processes of visual narration such as variable framing are coordinated with the narrative for the purpose of emphasizing the first item, or gestalt of items, seen by the audience, there are standard deviations from this principle. These deviations are often employed in thrillers for shock effect: the important subject, say the killer, is hidden in the shot in such a way that the audience only comes to see him belatedly (but unavoidably). In terms of our account, these deviations are not destructive counter-examples, for they still illustrate not only how the flow of narration is kept in strict control but also how important the coordination principle is, since this convention (i.e., cultural invention) can be used to hide elements in order to provoke surprises.

The narrative intelligibility of a movie is, in large measure, a function of the coordination of the large-scale, erotetic structure with processes of visual narration such as variable framing. The erotetic structure puts in place a range of audience expectations and the variable framing saliently poses, sustains, and answers the questions of the erotetic structure, generally by reframing events in such a way that what is most relevant to the presiding questions of the ongoing story is brought to the spectator's attention first. The apparently fragmentary flow of imagery in the popular movie is in fact structured by variable framing in a way that is subordinated to the questions of the large-scale, erotetic narration.

Erotetic narration, in coordination with variable framing and the other visual devices for controlling the spectator's attention, gives the events and actions portrayed in movies an unaccustomed intelligibility and coherence when contrasted with the events and actions we generally encounter in everyday life. Events are organized by presiding questions and broken down by reframing in such a way that we attend, without distraction (or virtually without distraction) to everything that is appropriate in the array to the question at hand. In most cases, of course, we are unaware of the questions, or, perhaps more accurately, the problematics that structure most of the events we encounter outside our movie theaters, and, of course, they are not framed for us in a way that neatly and economically organizes them in order to make those features of said events which are relevant to their problematic salient for observation. Movies, due to the coordination of erotetic narration and visual narration, have a hyper-clarity and cognitive perspicuousness that pleases the mind through its exceptional intelligibility.

This account of cinematic narration does not depend on any specific, academically established psychological theory. It stresses the way in which cinematic narration engages cognition, but it does not offer particular hypotheses about the nature of the specific cognitive-perceptual processing

mechanisms that cinematic narration exploits. I do not doubt that such cognitive mechanisms or processes subtend the reception of the cinematic narration in movies, nor do I think that it is beside the point to attempt to identify them, perhaps by means of experimentation. However, I leave the exact specification of those mechanisms to practicing, cognitive psychologists. My hope is that the characterization I have offered of cinematic narration in movies may provide them with useful starting points for the formation of further hypotheses.

I have attempted to characterize cinematic narration in movies without resorting to psychoanalytic categories. I have tried to show the way in which coherence is made in movies by means of the coordination of the system of erotetic narration especially with variable framing. I contend that this results in a portrayal of events notable for an especially high degree of intelligibility, which intelligibility I regard as one of the features of movies which make them so compelling for mass audiences. However, though I emphasize the importance of intelligibility—of, indeed, a kind of hyperbolic intelligibility of movies in contrast to everyday experience—in accounting for the powerful impression of movies, it should be clear that I see no connection between the kind of intelligibility of represented events I am discussing and the triggering of some sense of psychological subject-coherence in spectators. For me, the spectator recognizes the coherence of the *portrayed event* and derives pleasure from that alone. Similarly, I do not wish to claim that recognizing the intelligibility of a represented event in any way predisposes the spectator to regard the portrayal as transparent, or to accept the ideological insinuations that may attend an intelligible piece of narration. The acceptance of the ideological message of a movie is not a function of its use of forms such as erotetic narration and variable framing but primarily a consequence of the beliefs the spectator embraces before he or she enters the movie theater.

THE POWER OF MOVIES

In the preceding three chapters, we have seen that contemporary film theorists have attempted to explain the ideological effect of film by means of their analyses of the cinematic image, large-scale film narration, and processes of visual narration such as the shot/reverse shot figure, point-of-view editing, and so on. We have steadfastly denied that these structures are inherently ideological, maintaining that ideology in film is a matter of the content of specific films and their rhetorical organization, and of the generally antecedent belief systems spectators bring to films. We have also at-

tempted to develop alternative accounts to those of contemporary theory regarding the cinematic image, narrative, and the coherence of the image track. Needless to say, these alternative accounts do not explain the way in which these formal structures promote ideology, since we strenuously challenge the validity of that view. However, interestingly, these alternative approaches can be connected in a way which answers another question that concerns some contemporary film theorists and which we encountered in the first chapter, viz., what accounts for the powerful impression that film imparts?

Baudry attempted to answer this question by examining the projection apparatus of film from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. We, in turn, attacked the plausibility of his theory of the apparatus. Furthermore, we are now in a position as a result of the last three chapters to offer a countervailing view of the power of cinema in terms of our findings concerning the cinematic image, narrative, and the organization of the visual track in popular movies.

In one sense, of course, we cannot answer Baudry's question, for Baudry wanted to account for the reason why film is powerful, which is why he turned to an analysis of generic features of the medium such as projection. Baudry, that is, offers a theory of why the medium of cinema, irrespective of particular styles, genres, or films therein, imparts a powerful impression. But we are really in a position to say only why movies—a quite particular adaptation or use of the medium—are powerful. But nevertheless, I suspect that upon reflection contemporary film theorists should recognize that their question is really misconceived by Baudry, for the powerful impression they want explained is not really a function of cinema as such, but rather an effect of one kind of cinema, namely movies. That is, a theory of why movies are powerful is actually what theorists are searching for, not a theory of why the medium itself is powerful.

The argument for the reorientation of our theoretical question from why the cinematic medium is powerful to why movies are powerful is simple: cinema as such is not powerful. It has not been surgical documentaries, ballistics tests, or even modernist masterpieces that have made motion pictures (including TV) the dominant mass art of the twentieth century, one that is so widespread, internationally pervasive, accessible across boundaries of class and culture, and that is intensely engaging. Rather it is the adaptation of the medium for the purposes of movies, for the purposes of Hollywood International, which has gripped such widespread audiences so intensely. Not every type of cinema is powerful in the sense that it elicits intense responses from global audiences. Thus, I believe, that when people speak of accounting for the power of the cinematic medium, they really are

talking about the power of one style of cinema, namely movies (including narrative TV). For it is the movies, not experimental films or anthropological records, that have captivated the twentieth-century mass imagination. It is the power of movies about which researchers are really curious.

To speak of movies rather than film or cinema deliberately eschews essentialism. Posing the problem in an essentialist idiom—i.e., what makes the medium of cinema powerful—perverts our question. And furthermore, this has direct repercussions for research. For if, like Baudry, one thinks that one is speaking of the power of cinema as such, one will be prone to look for one's answer at a fairly generic level of investigation, such as the projection apparatus, since that apparatus has some claim to being a common feature of all films. But once one realizes that since not all films impart the powerful impression that make motion pictures such an extensively and intensively engaging art, then one sees that the explanation of the powerful impression that concerns us will not be a feature common to all films. That is, plumbing the essence of the medium or some common feature of all films, if there are such things, will not explain the phenomenon under examination.

The powerful impression that theorists attribute (wrongly) to cinema as such seems to comprise two factors: widespread engagement and intense engagement. But not every style of film found in the medium is widely accessible to nor intensely engaging of mass, popular audiences. Movies are. Moreover, we are in a position now to identify those features of the movie system which make them highly accessible to widespread audiences as well as intensely engaging.

In our discussion of the cinematic image, as it is employed in standard movies, we argued that such images could be recognized by untutored spectators without the necessity of training in processes of symbol reading, decoding, deciphering, or inference. Pictures, including motion pictures, we contend, are the sorts of symbols whose capacity to be recognized is acquired by percipients with the ability to recognize the objects or kinds of objects the pictures represent. Pictures, then, are eminently transmissable between cultures and their transmissability is not hindered by illiteracy. Clearly, this suggests an important feature of movies that accounts for their widespread accessibility across cultures and classes.

Another feature of movies that accounts for their accessibility is that movies tend to be narrative, concerned primarily with depictions of human actions. For narrative is, in all probability, our most pervasive and familiar means of explaining human activity. If you ask me why George is watering the tulips, I may answer that George intends to have, or wants, a beautiful

garden, and that he believes that he can't have a beautiful garden unless he waters the tulips. So I say he undertakes watering the tulips. You might ask me how he formed the desire to have a beautiful garden. I may refer to either his belief that this is a means of being a good citizen or to his guilt about never caring for his father's garden, or both, if his action is overdetermined. If you ask, where did he get the notion that the garden would not be beautiful unless he watered it, I say he read it in a book called *Beautiful Gardens* on May 17, 1953. Now if we tried to sum up this somewhat banal explanation of George's action, a narrative would probably be the likeliest, though not the only, means of organizing our information. George, racked with guilt feelings about his father's tulips and convinced that a beautiful garden is the means to the coveted ideal of good citizenship, decided to have a beautiful garden; and when he read, on May 17, 1953, that such gardens could not be had without watering the tulips, he went out and watered the tulips (on May 18). We might add that he continued to do so happily ever after. Insofar as this sort of narrative is one of the most common forms of human explanation, and insofar as much movie narration belongs to this category, movies will be familiar and accessible.

Moreover, the explanatory quality of such narration will also contribute to the clarity of movies which, we have argued in this chapter and the previous one, is relevant to the special intensity of our engagement with movies. Indeed, in a nutshell, we might express our thesis about the power of movies by saying that it resides in their easily graspable clarity for mass audiences.

Erotetic narration and the use of visual devices such as variable framing contribute to the special clarity of movies—to their heightened intelligibility when compared to the typical series of events we encounter in everyday life. Furthermore, this clarity, I submit, is the basis of our intense response to and engagement with movies. Movies appeal to our cognitive faculties by virtue of their forms. They answer questions that they vividly pose and they do this by means of potentially very economical devices for making relevant details salient.

We conceptualize the question of the power of movies as one concerning the ways in which movies have engaged the widespread, intense response of untutored audiences throughout the century. We have dealt with the issue of the widespread response to movies by pointing to those features that make movies particularly accessible. We have dealt with our intense engagement with movies in terms of the impression of coherence they impart, i.e., their easily grasped, indeed, their almost unavoidable, clarity. The accessibility of movies is at least attributable to their use of pictorial repre-

sentation, variable framing, and narrative, the latter being the most pervasive form of explaining human actions. Their clarity is at least a function of variable framing in coordination with the erotetic narrative, especially where erotetic narration and variable framing are coordinated by the principle that the first item or gestalt of items the audience apprehends be that which, out of alternative framings, is most important to the narration. In short, our thesis holds that the power of movies—their capacity to evoke unrivaled widespread and intense response—is first and foremost, at least, a result of their deployment of pictorial representation, erotetic narration, and variable framing.

It will undoubtedly be noted that in this attempt to account for the power of movies, we have restricted our purview to features in movies which address the *cognitive* faculties of the audience. For only by focusing on cognitive capacities, especially ones as deeply embedded as pictorial representation and the drive to get answers to our questions, will we be in the best position to find the features of movies that account for their phenomenally *widespread* effectiveness; since cognitive capacities, at the level discussed, seem the most plausible candidates for what mass-movie audiences have *in common*. That is, the question of the power of movies involves explaining how peoples of different cultures, societies, nations, races, creeds, educational backgrounds, age groups, political affiliations, and sexes can find movies easily accessible and gripping. Thus, the power of movies must be connected to some fairly generic features of human organisms to account for their power *across* class, cultural, and educational boundaries. The structures of perception and cognition are primary examples of fairly generic features of humans. Consequently, it seems that if we can suggest the ways in which movies are designed to engage and excite cognitive and perceptual structures, we will have our best initial approximation of their *generic power*.

Some qualifications are in order. First, we are not claiming that people do not respond intensely to forms other than movies; indeed, some people respond more intensely to other art forms than they do to movies. There are opera buffs and balletomanes, after all. But this is compatible with the claim that we are examining: that there is something special about the widespread and intense, though not necessarily universal, response that movies have been observed to command.

Next, we are not denying that there may be levers beyond those we have discussed that also figure in the account of the power of movies. Marketing structures, including advertising, are important elements as well as such factors as the transportability and reproducibility of movies. Research in

these areas should not be abandoned. However, considerations along these lines do not obviate the present sort of speculation, since there still must be something about the product, so marketed, that sustains interest.

Pictorial representation, variable framing, erotetic narration, and the interrelation of these elements in the ways proposed will, at the very least, be constituents of any account of the power of movies. I shall not pretend to have offered a *complete* account of why movies are powerful—my modesty signaled by the hedge "at the very least." Perhaps movies employ other clarifying features, such as music (which will be examined in the next section). Furthermore, apart from the question of why movies are powerful, we may wish to pursue different, but related, questions about why certain movies or groups of movies are powerful for certain groups of people; how do movies, or at least certain types of movies, engage particular classes, nations, generations, genders, and so on. Theoretical interest in these questions would undoubtedly lead to a focus on elements of structure and content that have not been addressed here, since we have just been concerned with the *generic* power of movies, not the power of movies for specific times, locales, sexes, age and interest groups. However, nothing we have said suggests an objection in principle to these more specific questions, which questions, of course, will, in all probability, lead to speculation about aspects of audiences over and above their cognitive faculties. Social conditioning and affective psychology, *appropriately constrained,* might be introduced to explain the power of given movies or types of movies for target groups. Sociology, anthropology, and certain forms of psychoanalysis are likely to be useful in such investigations. We can therefore continue to examine the power of movies by asking about the power of certain movies for historically specific audiences. However, if we wish to explain the power of movies for the world community, then pictorial representation, variable framing, and the erotetic narrative will be key elements in our account because of the ways in which they address common cognitive and perceptual capacities.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE THEORY OF MOVIE MUSIC

This section differs from previous ones in several respects. Earlier we were concerned with the visual elements of movies which contributed to their narrative intelligibility. Here we shall be preoccupied with certain aural, rather than visual, aspects of movies, which are not, strictly speaking, parts of the cinematic narration (*qua* representation), but which are intimately related to it. This change of focus, however, appears useful both

because it corrects the tendency within film theory to be overly preoccupied with the visual elements of film and enables us to illustrate the way in which one might extend the investigation of the power of movies discussed in the preceding section.

Another difference between this section and earlier chapters is that previously our method of exposition was to outline the views of contemporary film theorists on such matters as the cinematic image and narrative, to subject those views to very detailed criticism, and to propose alternative hypotheses. With movie music, however, we will forgo the intricate exposition and demolition of contemporary film scholars and plunge, almost immediately, into our own theory. This change in our approach is dictated by the fact that contemporary film theorists, though they have suggested approaches to the musical track, have not really integrated it into their theories in a manner explicit enough to sustain detailed criticism. Nevertheless, even though movie music is not a central topic of contemporary film theory, exploring this topic will prove instructive about the way in which our method of theorizing about movie music can serve as a contrast to the general approach to theory endorsed by the reigning film establishment.

One contemporary film theorist who has commented on movie music is Philip Rosen.[18] Rosen's project, however, is not to construct a theory of movie music, but to explicate the theory of film music expounded by Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler in the book *Composing for the Films*.[19] But in expounding the Adorno/Eisler theory of film music, Rosen makes a number of asides which suggest, very broadly, the way in which their theory might be segued with the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm, specifically in terms of suture theory. Rosen believes that the Adorno/Eisler theory of film music "has important implications, for if the analysis has correct elements, current studies of the suturing of the spectating subject 'into' the film may require greater attention to the musical track."[20] Thus, Rosen's reading of Adorno and Eisler suggests that movie music may have a role to play in the positioning and construction of identity of the subject in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense.[21] Rosen also believes that Adorno and Eisler might show us the way in which film music contributes to the illusion of reality that cinema is said to promote, making the film image seem ***natural*** and, presumably, transparent.

Adorno and Eisler contend:

> Since their beginning, motion pictures have been accompanied by music. The pure cinema must have had a ghostly effect like that of the shadow play—shadows and ghosts have always been associated. The magic function of music . . . consisted in appeasing the evil spirits unconsciously dreaded. Music was introduced as a kind of antidote against the picture. The need was felt

> to spare the spectator the unpleasantness involved in seeing effigies of living, acting, and even speaking persons who were at the same time silent. The fact they were living and nonliving at the same time is what constitutes their ghostly character, and music was introduced not only to supply them with the life they lacked—this became its aim only in the era of total ideological planning—but to exorcise fear or help the spectator absorb the shock. . . .
>
> The sound pictures have changed this original function of music less than might be imagined. *For the talking picture, too, is mute.* The characters in it are not speaking people but speaking effigies, endowed with all the features of the pictorial, the photographic two-dimensionality, the lack of spatial depth. Their bodiless mouths utter words in a way that must seem disquieting to anyone uninformed. Although the sound of these words is sufficiently different from the sound of natural words, they are far from providing "images of voice" in the same sense that photography provides us with images of people.[22]

The ghostliness of the cinematic image, including the speaking, cinematic image, is counteracted by film music which "intervenes, supplying muscular energy, a sense of corporeity, as it were."[23] The way in which this is brought about is a bit obscure, but it appears to rely in part on the fact that the music is experienced as in the same three-dimensional space as the audience, lending it an air of corporeity in contradistinction to the two-dimensional, ghostly images; speech in film putatively does not have a corresponding effect because it issues from ghostly mouths.[24]

For Rosen, this account suggests the way in which film music may suture an absence (and a purported contradiction[?!] between ear and eye) thereby contributing the illusion of reality and of naturalness while, in the process, positioning a subject. We have, of course, challenged the viability and coherence of these imputed ideological effects in other contexts, so there is no need to repeat previous criticisms of them at this point. Also, Rosen introduces these speculations hypothetically, holding these effects might occur *if* Adorno and Eisler are right. So the shortest way to deal with Rosen's suggestions is to deny that Adorno and Eisler are right.

As in our encounter with suture theory, we initially note with respect to Adorno and Eisler that their theory seems based on pretty flimsy evidence. They claim that film spectators feel discomfort viewing cinematic images *because* we find them ghostly (though these ghosts are different from the Absent One). Informal evidence for this might be that audiences are often restless during silent films, unaccompanied by music, and frequently complain about the silence. But perhaps we should take spectators at their word. Perhaps it is the *silence* that strikes them and not some putative fear of ghosts.

Moreover, pace Adorno and Eisler, one does not encounter comparable complaints with sound films. There is, to my knowledge, no evidence for believing that spectators respond to sound films in the way that Adorno and Eisler say they do. Like suture theorists, Adorno and Eisler base their analysis on postulating a state in the spectator that has no basis in the data of film viewing. One could, of course, test to see if spectators were uneasy when confronted with talking films (without music), however, such a test would have to take pains to assure that, if spectators showed signs of discomfort or complained, this was not caused by the particular kind of sound recording system employed. My own suspicion is that spectators will not be bothered by talking films without music, if the dialogue is sufficiently interesting to them; and if they are disturbed that may be because the dialogue is boring. But, in any case, whether I am right is less important than the point that the burden of proof rests with Adorno, Eisler, and their contemporary followers (if there are any). Without evidence, we have no reason to accept the function of film music they postulate, nor any incorporation of that putative function into theories about the subject and ideology. The way, that is, for an alternative theory of movie music is open.

Like Adorno and Eisler, I shall stress a functional relationship between music and movies though, of course, that functional relationship will be quite different than the one they propose. My position is *closer* to that articulated by Schopenhauer when he writes in the Third Book of *The World as Will and Idea* that "suitable music played to any scene, action, event or surrounding seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning, and appears as the most accurate and distinct commentary upon it."

There is not *one and only one* function that music can perform in relation to movies. Aaron Copland suggested five broad functions: creating atmosphere, underlining the psychological states of characters, providing background filler, building a sense of continuity, sustaining tension and then rounding it off with a sense of closure.[25] These do not seem to be necessarily exclusive categories, nor do they exhaust the range of functions that music can perform in movies. This is not said in order to criticize Copland, for, in fact, I intend to follow his example. I will analyze *a* function of movie music, freely admitting that there are others, and, moreover, I will not deny that this function may also be yoked together with the performance of other functions, such as those Copland enumerates.

The type of music I will discuss is quite central in popular, mass-market movies; it is a basic use of music, if not the most basic. I call this use of music *modifying music,* and in what follows I will attempt to describe its structure, to explain how it works and how it fits into the system of popular expression called the movies.

To begin to approach modifying music, it is helpful to consider some examples. In *Gunga Din,* there is an early scene where the British, led by Cary Grant, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and Victor McLaglen, enter a seemingly deserted village in search of foul doings. Indeed, the village has been raided by the nefarious Thugs, and those dastardly followers of Kali are lying in wait for the British. We have been somewhat alerted to this insofar as the scene is initiated by the use of an oboe in imitation of the sort of double-reed instrument associated with snake charmers, thereby signaling the presence of the Thugs in the deserted village. There is an ambush. During the ensuing battle, there is a recurring theme that is associated with the efforts of Grant, McLaglen, and Fairbanks. Earlier, we had heard the same theme accompanying their drunken brawl over a phony treasure map. In the ambush scene, an interlude of strings will be followed by horns at a scherzo-like tempo. Often this theme comes in when our soldiers of fortune gain the upper hand, but not always. The horns are bouncy, light, and playful. The battle scene, full of death and danger, could be the object of high anxiety. But the use of the horns in this theme colors the scene in such a way that we come to view it as a lark, as cheery, as a game, as comic rather than potentially tragic. This, of course, corresponds to one of the views of war and manhood that the film promotes—i.e., war as an outlet for boyish, beamish energy.[26] Of course, from our point of view, what is important about the scene is the way in which the scherzo-like refrain directs the audience to view the mayhem as jaunty—almost comic—good fun.

In *Rebel Without a Cause,* we find a wholly different feeling associated with the onscreen violence. Underlying the confrontation and the fight, called the blade-game, which occurs after the visit to the planetarium, is atonal music, marked by odd time signatures and dissonant blaring brass. The use of the timpani and horns, along with the timing, gives the music a Stravinsky-like flavor. As well, the music is sometimes recorded low, and, then, abruptly, the recording level is raised. The dissonance imparts a brooding feeling to the scene, a sense of latent, almost muscular violence that flashes out when the brass blares or the recording level shoots up. The uneasy, unstable quality of the music serves to characterize the psychological turmoil—the play of repression and explosive release—with which the scene, and the movie, is concerned.

For an example not involved with violence, consider the opening of *The Yearling.* The camera displays views of the Everglades as Gregory Peck, playing a Civil War veteran, recalls how he came to make his home there. The score is dominated by strings which have strong connotations of richness and lushness, reflecting, of course, the way in which we are to take this place. What Peck's voice and the visuals may fail to make you realize

about the landscape, the music enables you to grasp. Also, the strings have a slightly haunting flavor and a sense of pastness which coincides with the appearance this film suggests of being swathed in memory. When we are introduced to the juvenile lead Jody (played by Claude Jarmon Jr.), the music sounds somewhat pentatonic, like an elongated country melody, conveying a feeling that is both lazy and dreamy. This not only corresponds to what we immediately see of Jody—he is playing listlessly with a toy windmill—but to what we learn of Jody throughout the film, viz., that he is a dreamer. In terms of the subject matter of the movie, a major source of tension between Peck and his wife, played by Jane Wyman, develops because Peck believes that youth *should* be a time when the imagination is given its head, before the hardships and responsibilities of practical life force one to turn to sterner things. Wyman resists this, and the battle between youth and imagination, on the one hand, versus adulthood and practicality, on the other, is staged over Flag, the yearling from whom the film derives its title. Throughout *The Yearling,* the use of the strings repeatedly stresses the theme of imagination by underscoring and characterizing the various spoken reveries and gambolings of characters in terms of an undeniable, albeit very nineteen-fortyish, feeling of dreaminess.

These examples are not alike in every respect. The theme from *Gunga Din* functions narratively as a leitmotif, whereas the example from *Rebel Without a Cause* does not. However, the three examples share a very basic function, one which in fact enables the theme from *Gunga Din* to do its more specialized work so well. Namely, in each of these examples the music characterizes the scene, i.e., imbues the scene with certain expressive properties. This may be a matter of enhancing qualities that are already suggested in the imagery, but it need not be; the music may attribute to the visuals an otherwise unavailable quality. Nor does the expressive quality in question have to be grounded in the psychology of a character; in the *Gunga Din* example the *jauntiness* of the music appears to attach first and foremost to the action rather than to internal states of characters. And, lastly, the expressive qualities projected in these examples are in the music. We do not suddenly become dreamy when we hear the strings of *The Yearling*. Rather the dreaminess of the music characterizes Jody as dreamy to us. If we are pro-dreaminess, the way Gregory Peck and the film are, then we are apt to feel sympathetic (rather than dreamy) in regard to Jody. That is, by speaking of the projection of expressive qualities, we are not claiming that the music arouses in spectators the selfsame feeling qualities that it projects.

We can call this use of movie music modifying music. The music modifies

the movie. The music possesses certain expressive qualities which are introduced to modify or to characterize onscreen persons and objects, actions and events, scenes and sequences. To use a crude analogy, one which must eventually be abandoned, the visual track is to a noun as the music is to an adjective, or, alternatively, the visuals are to a verb as the music is to an adverb. Just as adjectives and adverbs characterize, modify, and enrich the nouns and verbs to which they are attached, modifying music serves to add *further* characterization to the scenes it embellishes. This is a very pervasive use of movie music. Let us now turn to a discussion of its internal dynamics.

Movie music involves coordinating two different symbol systems: music and movies, the latter including not only visuals but recorded sounds, both natural and dialogic. In the case of modifying music, these two symbol systems are placed in a complementary relationship; each system supplies something that the other system standardly lacks, or, at least, does not possess with the same degree of effectiveness that the other system possesses.

Music, for example, is a highly expressive symbol system. This is not to say that all music is expressive or that it should be expressive, but only that much music is expressive. For example, that the Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* is expressive of yearning or that the "Great Gate at Kiev" from *Pictures at an Exhibition* is expressive of majesty are part of the incontestable data of aesthetic theorizing. To say that music is expressive is to say that it projects qualities describable in anthropomorphic, emotive terms. The symbol system of music is also sometimes thought to have more direct access to the emotive realm than any other symbol system. Nietzsche called music "the immediate language of the will."[27]

At the same time, it is often noted that nonvocal music—orchestral music[28]—though quite effective in expressing a broad palette of emotions, is not the ideal means for particularizing the feelings it projects. That is, a piece of nonvocal orchestral music may strike us as sorrowful or even more broadly as "down," but we generally cannot specify much further the kind of dolors or dumps the music projects. Is it melancholic, neurasthenic, suicidal, adolescent, etc.? That is, nonvocal music standardly lacks what the philosopher of music Peter Kivy calls emotive explicitness.[29]

This lack of emotive explicitness has figured in numerous debates in the history of music. Some, like Johann Adam Hiller, took it as a limitation to be overcome, urging that if music is to become intelligible, i.e., emotively explicit, it must be combined with speech.[30] A similar view was espoused by James Beattie, who held that "the expression of music without poetry is vague and ambiguous."[31] Peter Kivy has brilliantly demonstrated that the

development of the expressive arsenal of Western orchestral music, as we know it, was the result of solving the *perceived* problem of music's emotive inexplicitness through text setting.[32] In a different mood, Eduard Hanslick argued against the expression of emotions as a goal of music because he believed that music cannot express definite emotions, while Nietzsche, staking out an altogether different position, sees the emotive inexplicitness of music as the path to some coveted form of universality: "whoever gives himself up entirely to the impression of a symphony, seems to see all possible events of life and the world take place in himself."[33]

The vicissitudes of the preceding positions are less important to us than their recurring assumption, which we shall state weakly as follows: typically, nonvocal music is expressive of emotive qualities but ones that are inexplicit, ambiguous, and broad. A theoretical explanation of why this should be is also readily available. Emotions are directed, directed at persons, objects, states of affairs, and events. Indeed, it is in virtue of the intentional objects to which emotions are directed that we individuate emotions.[34] I am afraid *of being run over by a train;* you are in love *with Bob;* we are angered *by apartheid.* For an emotion to be fully explicit and particularized, it must be aimed at some object. The object may be real, like South Africa, or fantasized, e.g., you may be terrified of the Green Slime. To become explicit, that is, the emotion must be referred to something. To say whether the joy in the music is hysterical or utopian, we would have to know toward what the joy was directed. And, of course, it is this sort of reference that is most commonly absent from music, that is, nonvocal music.[35] Insofar as representation is not a primary function of standard orchestral music, most music of this sort will lack the logical machinery to secure emotive particularity. This is not to say that orchestral music cannot be representational: e.g., *Wellington's Victory,* Honegger's *Pacific 231,* and the use of percussion to *refer* to King Kong's offscreen footsteps in the film of the same name.[36] And where the music is representational, a measure of emotive explicitness may be achievable. However, as I have said, as a matter of fact, most nonvocal music lacks the logical machinery which emotive explicitness requires.

So far I have claimed that orchestral music of the sort often employed in movies is a symbol system that makes a powerful yet broad and inexplicit emotive address. And this inexplicitness, in turn, is a result of the fact that generally such music is non-referring. Movies, on the other hand, are symbol systems with numerous overlapping referential dimensions, including the cinematographic image, dialogue, narrative, and synchronized sound. Wedding the musical system to the movie system, then, supplies the

kind of reference required to particularize the broad expressivity of the musical system. The *dreaminess* of the strings in *The Yearling* is specified as Jody's dreaminess, as the dreaminess of a young boy prior to the hard lessons of life.

The relation between the music and the movie in the case of modifying music is reciprocal. The movie—the visuals, the narrative, the dialogue, and the synchronized sound—serve as *indicators*. At one level, these elements establish what the scene is about. They indicate the reference of the scene. The music then modifies or characterizes what the scene is about in terms of some expressive quality. In a manner of speaking, the music tells us something, of an emotive significance, about what the scene is about; the music supplies us with, so to say, a description (or, better, a presentation) of the emotive properties the film attaches to the referents of the scene.

In our *Gunga Din* example, the movie establishes the subject, the battle, and the music imbues it with a feeling, that of jauntiness.[37] The musical element, which I call a *modifier, fills in* the subject matter in terms of the feeling the filmmaker finds appropriate to the scene. However, at the same time, the movie elements, what I have called the indicators, stand in an important relation of influence to the musical component. The music on its own is bouncy, light, and comic. When conjoined with the movie elements those feelings become further particularized as manly, dare-devil bravado. The musical system, so to speak, carves out a broad range or spectrum of feeling, in this case, one that is positive, lively, and energetic. The movie elements, the indicators, then narrow down or *focus* more precisely the qualities in that range or spectrum that are relevant to the action. The music no longer signals mere energy but more precisely bravado. This focusing operation of the movie-as-indicator, in turn, enables the music-as-modifier to fill in the action as a highly particularized feeling.

It might be initially helpful to think of the relation of the movie-as-indicator to the music-as-modifier on the model of the subject-predicate relation: the music says " . . . is jaunty" and the movie specifies the blank with "the battle." However, though suggestive, this analogy cannot be taken too seriously because the movie elements perform functions other than referring and focusing, and because the linguistic notion of predication seems to be strictly inapplicable to motion cinema (i.e., pictures lack discriminable subject-predicate elements and show objects with their properties, all at once, so to speak). Thus, though modifying music resembles linguistic predication loosely, it should not be taken as a literal example of it.

Another possible avenue of misunderstanding modifying music would

be an oversimplification that regards music as exclusively expressive and the movie components as exclusively representational. As was earlier remarked, music can be used representationally. Similarly, movie elements have myriad means of expression—not only through acting, but through lighting, camera movement, camera angulation, cutting, etc. Indeed, the generally referential soundtrack can be "musically" arranged in order to aspire to musical expressivity, e.g., the natural sounds at the opening of *Street Scene* and the dialogue in *Force of Evil*. Thus, it is not the case that the movie is pure representation to be supplemented by means of musical expression. However, in reaching out for music, the movie is seeking to incorporate an added, particularly powerful, augmented means of expression along with the visual, narrative, and dramatic means already at its disposal. The addition of music gives the filmmaker an especially direct and immediate means for assuring that the audience is matching the correct expressive quality with the action at hand. This is not to say that music is the film's only expressive lever; rather it is a notably direct and reliable one. It enhances the filmmaker's expressive control over the action.

If adding music to the movie enhances one's expressive control over the action, it is also the case that the imagery intensifies the impact of the music by particularizing its affective resonance. The unnerving, shrieking strings in *Psycho* are cruel, painful, and murderous when matched with Norman Bates' descending knife. Here, the reference afforded by the movie elements serves to individuate the emotive content of the music in the way that narrative and pantomime do in ballet, and as words do in a popular song or opera.

Modifying music is one of the major uses of music in popular movies. It may be used to embellish individual scenes and sequences, or it may be integrated into leitmotif systems. Structurally, modifying music involves the use of movie elements—photography, narrative, dialogue, and synchronized sound—as ***indicators*** that fix the reference of a shot, scene, or sequence. The associated musical elements are ***modifiers*** which attribute expressive qualities to the referent, thereby characterizing it emotively as, for example, dreamy or jaunty. Functionally, the addition of musical modifiers to the scene augments the expressivity of the scene, though this does not preclude the possibility that the scene already possesses many nonmusical expressive devices. Nevertheless, music is a particularly privileged means of direct, expressive augmentation. The musical modifiers function to *fill-in* the scene expressively, to set the expressive tone the filmmaker takes to be appropriate to the scene. The music "saturates" the scene expressively. At the same time that the musical modifiers influence the reception of the

movie, the movie indicators also reciprocally influence the reception of the music. For music typically, sans referential machinery, projects a very broad and inexplicit range of emotive qualities. Thus, in *The African Queen,* when the boat is stuck in the channel, the slow, spaced-out drum beats project a generic, plodding feeling while the movie elements specify that feeling as Bogart's effort, an effort charged with all his hopes and commitments. Thus, as the music fills in the movie, the movie *focuses* the emotive content of the music, particularizing and intensifying its effect which, of course, also abets the filling-in work that the musical modifier does.

I have attempted to explain the way in which modifying music operates. Modifying music is not employed, of course, only in movies—it occurs in other sorts of films, such as art films, as well as in other art forms, such as ballet. As well, it is not the only use of music found in movies. Yet, though the relation between modifying music and the movies is not unique in any sense, there is a way in which modifying music serves the aims of the movie system quite expeditiously. Thus, I will conclude this sketch of modifying music by discussing the way that modifying music segues into the economy of the movies.

Movies are a means of popular expression. That is, they are aimed at mass audiences. They aspire for means of communication that can be grasped almost immediately by untutored audiences. Another way of putting this is to say that moviemakers seek devices that virtually guarantee that the audience will follow the action in the way that the filmmaker deems appropriate. The movie close-up, for example, as we saw in the preceding section, assures the filmmaker that the spectator is looking exactly where she should be looking at the appropriate moment. Similarly, modifying music, given the almost direct expressive impact of music, assures that the untutored spectators of the mass movie audience will have access to the desired expressive quality and, in turn, will see the given scene under its aegis.[38]

Second, an important element accounting for the power of movies is the clarity that movies bestow upon the events that they depict. In contrast to our encounters in everyday life, movie events have an unaccustomed intelligibility and lucidity; movies, that is, are so much more legible than life. Modifying music contributes to the clarity of movies in several different respects. The filling-in function of the music modifier keeps the expressive quality of the scene constantly foregrounded, thereby supplying a continuous channel of information about the emotional significance of the action. Unlike our quotidian experience of events, the music constantly alerts us to the feeling that goes with what we see. Whereas in life, the affect that goes with an observation is so often unknown, in movies, we not only have some

affect but also the appropriate affect tied to virtually everything we see, through modifying music. The movie world is emotionally perspicuous through and through.

Reciprocally, the focusing function of the movie indicators render the emotive content of the music more and more explicit, again enhancing their clarity in yet another way. The concerted interplay of the music and the movie yields images replete with highly clarified, virtually directly accessible, expressive qualities. Thus, though modifying music is not a unique feature of movies, its capacity for promoting immediately accessible, explicit, and continuous emotive characterizations of the ongoing, onscreen action makes it *so suitable* to the presiding commitments of mass movie communication that *it would be a mystery* had movies failed to exploit it.

The suture theorist, hearing this account of modifying music—or, for that matter, our earlier accounts of erotetic narration and variable framing—might respond that all I have done is to isolate the coherence making features of movies which enable suturing to occur. That is, a contemporary film theorist could be tempted to say that my theories are merely preparatory to suture theory. Suture theory can integrate these small-scale theories—of movie imaging, narrating, and music—in the larger theory of suture. Once we isolate the nitty-gritty mechanics of the way in which these processes operate, the suture theorist can step in and appropriate these accounts of cinematic coherence, adding, of course, that with coherence (or the appearance of coherence) comes subject positioning. Perhaps with regard to modifying music, a suture theorist might say that it positions the subject emotively, or that the music sutures the absence of affect from the image track.

Of course, we can resist the imperialism of suture theory by demanding to know why, once we have offered a small-scale explanation of the way in which modifying music—or erotetic narration or variable framing—operates, we should go on to postulate subject positioning? And we can, for example, ask what features of the data are left out of our explanations such that we need to hypothesize a psychological state of suturing?

Whereas our theories, such as that of modifying music, are small-scale theories, suture theory, in its expanded version, is a large-scale theory, one designed to subsume theories of cinematic imaging, narration, and music under its abstract vocabulary of subject positioning. But this may indicate that suture theory, as well as other articulations of contemporary theory, are not particularly useful frameworks for answering our questions about film. For they are not likely to shed light on the way in which specific types of cinematic configurations function but rather say of each of them: they

suture, or they position subjects. However, these conclusions follow theoretically for contemporary film analysts once one acknowledges that a cinematic configuration is coherent. Thus, these explanations do not account for the way in which specific, coherent cinematic patterns are constructed. In the following "Conclusion," I will attempt to assess the methodological advisability of the large-scale theorizing preferred by contemporary film theorists versus the kind of small-scale theorizing—such as the theory of modifying music, erotetic narration, variable framing, and even of the power of movies—that I endorse.

CONCLUSION
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY FILM THEORY

In the seventies and eighties, in the United States, cinema studies, as an academic discipline, burgeoned. As a rising area of university study, film scholarship sought to legitimatize itself. And, as well, the rapid expansion of cinema studies entailed the entry of many young scholars into the field. These young scholars, given the massive, unwieldy, and virtually disorganized nature of their data, searched for a ready-made framework with which to regiment their materials. The result of these pressures was the adoption of what, in this book, we refer to as "contemporary film theory," an amalgam of Anglo-French vintage, most often comprised, at least, of Althusserian-derived Marxism, Barthesian textual criticism, and, most importantly, of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The theme of this book has been that "contemporary film theory" has been nothing short of an intellectual disaster and that it should be discarded. In concluding my brief against contemporary film theory, however, I will not recapitulate the particular objections that were mounted in previous chapters, but rather will attempt to offer some general summary remarks about the liabilities of contemporary film theory.

The most obvious, recurring problem with contemporary film theory is that its central concepts are often systematically ambiguous, due in some cases, but not all, to their essentially metaphorical nature. A consequence of this is that, in the main, the arguments and analyses of contemporary film theory turn out to be little more than extended exercises in equivocation.

For examples of ambiguity, recall how we saw in our opening chapter that both the immobility of the eighteen-month-old child and the seated

position of the film viewer were described in terms of inhibited motoricity. Also, under the rubric *absence,* Metz considers both the absence of the referent of the film image from the screening room and the "absence" of the film viewer from the world of the film as cognate phenomena. But surely these concepts are being stretched to the breaking point. Indeed, terms like suture and mirror, in the language of contemporary film theory, can be extended to virtually anything. This, of course, is not testimony to the explanatory power of these concepts, but rather evidence that they are ill-defined and ambiguous in ways that render them theoretically useless. That is, for a term to be theoretically adequate we should have a clear sense of when not to apply it as well as a sense of when to apply it; it should have some rigorously stipulated parameters. For only then can we rest assured that the concept has something relevant to tell us about whatever specific phenomenon we are investigating.

The tendency toward ambiguity in contemporary film theory is abetted by what might be called a penchant for Platonizing. All different sorts of desire, such as a male viewer's sexual desire for a movie character and any viewer's desire that the movie be intelligible, are slotted under the abstract noun *Desire,* whose laws the Lacanian then charts. One, of course, wonders whether, ontologically, there is such a thing as *Desire* per se, rather than particularized desire*s* for this or that. Desires, that is, are individuated by reference to their objects (e.g., the desire *for ice cream*) not as instances of some unified, univocally named force called *Desire.* Similarly, something may be *absent* from a movie theater or absent *from the world of the film* without being the occasion of some abstract *Absence* of which castration is also an instance. By trading on these vague nominalizations, contemporary film theorists obfuscate the phenomenon at hand rather than clarifying it.

As has been noted already, many of the putative explanations in contemporary film theory are couched in metaphors and analogies; "suture" and "mirror," for example, were mentioned above. Now some may feel that the problem here is that metaphors and analogies have no place in theoretical or scientific discourse.[1] However, such a view seems too draconian and I, at least, would agree with those who see a legitimate role for metaphors and analogies in theorizing.[2] But although I think that metaphors can be scientific, I do not believe that the use of metaphor and analogy in contemporary film theory generally accords with acceptable scientific or theoretical practice.[3]

The function of a scientific metaphor or analogy is to give us knowledge about some phenomenon that we know little about by reference to something we know more about. The metaphor of waves is particularly useful in

physics. But in order for a scientific metaphor to work, we must have a distinct picture of the known phenomenon that is being used to illuminate the unknown phenomenon. However, in contemporary film theory, the supposedly explanatory metaphors are often as vague or more vague than the topic they are meant to elucidate. For example, we often hear, in contemporary film theory, that the subject is turning or sliding during subject positioning. These images—of turning and sliding—are introduced in order to help us grasp obscure psychic processes. But forget the psychic processes for the moment. Now concentrate. Soon you will ask—just what are we supposed to envision as concrete examples of sliding and turning. Is the sliding done in a groove or on a slippery surface? Is the turning like that of a rock suspended by a string, like a planet on its axis, or like the needle of a compass? That is, what concrete physical forces are we to have in mind? For if we have none in mind, how can we extrapolate from them so as to understand the even more obscure psychic processes that supposedly correlate to them?

The metaphors and analogies of contemporary film theory are generally so vague and abstract that they are not internally rich enough to supply us with a picture of anything, let alone with a template with which to trace the outline of obscure psychic processes. We may call this the fallacy of the indigent metaphor, and it is rampant in contemporary film theory.

It might be said that such metaphors as "turning" and "sliding" do perform some service. They tell us that the subject is slippery and in motion. But this is not particularly informative unless we have a grasp of *what* such subjects are slippery, and, in motion, in reference to. The metaphor will be viable in proportion to the clarity of its focusing term.

Moreover, a strong scientific metaphor should have some degree of systematicity and fecundity. That is, it should enable us to expand upon it. If A and B are similar in respect to property x, and if A, the focusing term of our metaphor, also has properties y and z, then we test to see if properties analogous to y and z can be found in B. But since the metaphors of contemporary film theory are often too vague, we cannot use them to articulate further the structures and forces within the psychic processes in question. Also, when we have a firm grasp of the processes referred to by the focusing term of a metaphor, we can use that to predict the next stage of the process that is mysterious to us. This feature of scientific metaphors is also related to teaching the metaphor—that is, the student can use the metaphor to see how the mysterious process hangs together as a sequence because the student has a clear picture of the process in the focusing term of the metaphor. But with examples such as the hazy "slidings and turnings"

of the subject in contemporary film theory, it is anyone's guess as to what precedes or follows them.

As we have seen throughout this book, the reliance on metaphors and analogies in contemporary film theory has time and again led to arguments and analyses that exemplify the fallacy of equivocation. One might indeed say that contemporary film theory is little more than a tissue of puns. As a general method of refutation, one should replace all the qualifications that the contemporary film theorist deletes and the desired "emperor has no clothes effect" will follow almost immediately. For example, in *Questions of Cinema*, Heath wants to make the rather startling point that narrative is "a decisive instance of framing in film."[4] Thus does contemporary film theory attempt to equate pictorial mimesis with diegesis. Heath supports this discovery by citing the importance of narrative closure. He also feels that, in some way, the narrative "encloses" the space of the film. He wants us to think of narrative as a literal frame. But what does narrative closure have to do with a frame? If one says the narrative encloses the space of the film one uses an extremely loose metaphor that means the space of a narrative film is coherent in terms of the narrative. A narrative does not, however, enclose a visual expanse by surrounding it in the way a frame does. The argument—that a narrative encloses and, therefore, frames—is, consequently, not sound. For once we add its missing premise—all frames enclose (in the qualified sense of *surround*)—we see that the way narratives enclose is not really covered by the relevant, qualified (though previously deleted) generalization. By searching for equivocations, one can derail a surprising number of the analyses of contemporary film theory. Since there is an especially high incidence of equivocation in contemporary film theory, a reader must patiently attend to every different meaning of words like *center* and *frame* within a given analysis.

The equivocations in contemporary film theory are encouraged by the fact that many of the main concepts in the system are associatively inter-substitutable. *Meaning, closure, coherence, position, binding, frame, center, homogeneity, unity, balance,* and so forth are either cognates for the contemporary film theorist, or so enmeshed that mention of one licenses the invocation of any of the others (despite the apparent disjunctiveness of many of these concepts—e.g., to have a meaning is not a necessary or sufficient condition for being balanced, and vice versa). This allows the contemporary film theorists to move rapidly from claims such as "narratives have closure" to "narratives frame" to "narratives center." These associative trains run over the differences within the phenomena under discussion. But what really grounds these associations? In fact, they are not rigorously

defined and interrelated theoretical terms. Rather, they are garden-variety image clusters—words grouped together in ordinary language because they share rather broad connotative qualities. *Center* and *unity* go together in the same way that *gap* and *absence* could be grouped with *cold* and *gray*, or, to use a classic example, with *ping* (rather than *pong*). These words, in short, seem interchangeable because they share affective resonances and not because the contemporary film theorist has shown us that they represent the same phenomena in every case, or even in many cases. The contemporary film theorist acts as though his terms are interdefinable when they really only belong to similar emotive meaning clusters. However, what is a boon for poetry is a bane for theory.

The ambiguity of the central concepts of contemporary film theory is perhaps connected to the other major liability of this approach, viz., its ambition. Contemporary film theory is engaged in the totalizing attempt to erect The Theory of Film, i.e., a theory that contrives to explicate in one unified theoretical vocabulary queries into issues as diverse as the mechanism of point-of-view editing, the nature of the avant-garde, the mechanisms of movie advertising, the nature of the soundtrack, the nature of the camera lens, the operation of ideology, etc. That a theoretical vocabulary that answers so many different kinds of questions in the same terms (e.g., subject positioning) tends toward ambiguity is predictable (though still inexcusable for the reasons given above). However, we should question not only the ambiguous rhetoric of contemporary film theory but also the advisability of attempting to construct a unified theory of film.

I have no argument to show that a unified theory of film is impossible. But one can suggest the ways in which the attempted construction of such a theory, in the manner in which contemporary film theorists pursue it, is likely to go wrong. Contemporary film theory is "top down." From their readings of such people as Lacan and Althusser, they derive a general theory, such as that of subject positioning, and then they attempt to graft that account onto specific phenomena, such as point-of-view editing or movie advertisements, usually by means of equivocation or some other exercise of ambiguity. That is, they apply the general theory to each aspect of film which they want to explain. The problems this creates in their reasoning has been explored, as well as the fact that the general theory they employ is, to say the least, questionable. However, the "top down" approach is also suspect in a way that can be readily confirmed by a patient, "nonaligned" reader—viz., everything you ever wanted to know about film gets roughly the same answer, most often in terms of subject positioning. Movie ads, genre films, avant-garde films, point-of-view shots, movie mu-

sic, stars, and so on are all explained by the same subject positioning formula with its interplay of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and of Presence and Absence. Similarly, if the theory is employed in the analysis of individual films, we find, surprisingly, that avant-gardists like Malcolm LeGrice are indulging the Imaginary no less than a Sylvester Stallone. That is, the explanatory bottom line turns out to be pretty much the same no matter what film, and no matter what level of filmic phenomena, is being discussed. This is not only downright monotonous, it is theoretically threadbare, if not vacuous.

At this time, a "top down" theory of film seems inappropriate. For by explaining every aspect of film by means of the same formulas it blurs our understanding of specific aspects of film. The answers it supplies to our questions are too general; specific films, specific film forms, and specific filmic articulations are all painted with the same theoretical brush. But surely we expect theories to tell us about the characteristic workings of specific phenomena rather than about what everything has in common.

There are many things that we would like to know about film. Why do mass market movies have such an intense appeal to so many different types of audiences? What is the nature of film metaphor? What are the images of women in American film? How does movie music work? What are the characteristic structures of film editing? In what ways does film disseminate ideology? Can documentary films be objective? What is the structure of the movie market? Can avant-garde films save the world and should they be expected to? How are film narratives processed cognitively? What is a movie genre? What is the structure of the *film noir*? And so on. These questions address different levels of abstraction and there is no reason to expect that they can be adequately answered within one theoretical framework or be reduced to a few formulas. Indeed, there is more reason to suppose that if all these questions are answered in the same way, the theory is likely to be, in fact, uninformative.

It is, of course, my claim that contemporary film theory is uninformative and overly general in exactly this way. By attempting to answer all our questions of cinema from the overarching framework of Marxist-psychoanalytic theory it has given us a small package of slogans instead of explanations. And even those who would reject my overall diagnosis here, I believe, would admit that contemporary film theory, after a burst of energy in the seventies, is languishing in the mid-eighties.

On my account, contemporary film theory is totalizing (i.e., pretending to be The Theory of Film, as well as a lot else), and is "top down." My suggested remedy for malaise of film theory is that it become piecemeal and

"bottom up." Instead of searching for the unified theory of film, we should attempt to carve out clear and manageable questions about aspects of film—such as "How does the Art Cinema work?"—and then go on to answer them. This, at the very least, has great heuristic value. It is far less daunting to ask and answer questions, for example, about the structures and compositional potential of wide-screen cinematography, than it is to determine what Film Theory, construed as a single, totalized system, should comprise. Nor—and this is more to the point—is there any reason to believe that all the theoretical interests we have in film will fall neatly into a single systematic framework. We may wish to know how Hollywood star imagery affects American voting habits; and we may wish to know how certain editing patterns suggest causation between spatially discontinuous objects. Answers to these questions call for film theor*ies,* i.e., piecemeal theories about aspects of film. Indeed, looking at the diversity of questions we have about film—which stand on different levels of abstraction and which call upon the resources of very different disciplines—should lead us to embrace at least an initial presumption that these questions are not likely to be answered by some overarching Film Theory that systematically interrelates everything one wants to know of film. In fact, the desire for such a Film Theory may stand—and I would contend that it has stood—in the way of acquiring theoretical insight into the workings of cinema.

Currently, then, we are in need of piecemeal theorizing, in need of theor*ies* about film rather than Film Theory—be those theories sociological, psychological, philosophical, narratological, or devoted to the study of audience reception, or to the quasi-rhetorical study of specific film devices, structures, genres, etc. Perhaps some of the fruits of our various piecemeal theories will be organizable into larger, systematic and theoretical constellations. In the chapter preceding this one, for example, I attempted to coordinate an account of the workings of movie music with a broader view of the function of movies. Just as there is no reason to believe that there is an overarching Film Theory, there is no reason to preclude antecedently that some of the answers to our piecemeal theories can not be coordinated into larger theoretical complexes. But at this point, all we can do is to generate small-scale theories, watching out of the corner of our eye to see if their results can be gathered into larger theoretical constructions. This, of course, is what is meant by urging that our approach to theory be "bottom up," viz., that if more comprehensive and complex large-scale theories can be derived, they should be derived from the comparison and scrutiny of what we regard to be successful piecemeal theories.

In producing small-scale theories, our concern is that we frame our

questions explicitly and clearly and in a way that is manageable enough for us to supply answers to our questions. The researcher must worry about whether his or her questions are clear and worthwhile, and not about whether they are really part of Film Theory. If a question is interesting and its answer contributes some general knowledge about film—whether sociological, philosophical, or formal—then it is a contribution to our growing theoretical knowledge of film.[5]

Throughout this book I have attempted to supply examples of piecemeal theorizing. Typically, after criticizing an account of this or that topic, as explicated by contemporary film theorists, I have attempted to sketch what I think is the correct account of the phenomena in question—e.g., cinematic representation, visual narration, and so. Part of my motive in developing alternative accounts was argumentative. That is, I not only wanted to show that the approach in question was false but also that there was a competing approach that can handle the facts more expeditiously. The fielding of rival theories, of course, is a standard tool of scientific debate. But, at the same time, my rival accounts are also specimens of piecemeal theorizing—small-scale theories of *movie* narration, the structures of visual narration, and of movie music. Suggestions are made about the way in which these small-scale theories can be coordinated, but the result is not an overarching theory of film because first of all my domain is restricted to what are called *movies* and, of course, I do not pretend to have answered every question, or even every important question, about movies. Moreover, the coordinated theory of movies that emerges from my debates with contemporary film theorists is a "bottom up" theory.

My emphasis on piecemeal theorizing manifests my view that theoretical enquiry into any area requires the framing of precise questions as a condition for meaningful progress. In order to know, we must know, to some extent, what we want to know; one will not get very far by intently contemplating a body of data. You have to know what you are looking for and the best way to get clear about what you are looking for is to develop precise questions. Without precise questions, our theories will founder. Moreover, at this point in film studies, the questions we are best equipped both to propose and to pursue with any precision are piecemeal in nature.

By calling for piecemeal theorizing, I am not striking allegiance with the emerging viewpoint that in place of the grand-scale theorizing of the seventies and early eighties, film studies should now redirect its energies to the interpretation of cinematic masterpieces, whose study, it is thought, will provoke theorizing in respect to specific films. I do not regard the study of individual films, in and of itself, as theoretical activity. At best it will

result in undirected ruminations about cinema. The film theorist of the present must be more assertive, framing precise questions of general import rather than awaiting "theoretical" perplexities to emerge from the examination of single films that may be idiosyncratically interesting but in theoretically irrelevant ways. The totalizing theory of the seventies and early eighties is to be rejected, but not at the cost of despairing altogether the possibility of acquiring generalized knowledge of film.

For the last decade, film studies in America have been dominated by an established theory, the psychoanalytic-Marxist theory described in this book. And, moreover, this period of domination corresponds to a time in which the academic study of film has grown dramatically. The establishment theory has, as a result, become, effectively, the lingua franca of a new academic field. It provides a common medium of discourse for an entire generation of film scholars. The problem with this language, however, is that it says virtually nothing. It has impeded research and reduced film analysis to the repetition of fashionable slogans and unexamined assumptions. New modes of theorizing are necessary. We must start again.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. For a discussion of classical film theory, see Noel Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

2. Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signfication au cinéma* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968). An English translation of this text, in its 1971 edition, was published by Oxford University Press in 1974, under the title *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema.*

3. Philip Rosen, *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

4. See especially André Bazin *What Is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), vol. I.

5. See the second chapter of my *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory,* and my "Concerning Photographic and Cinematic Representation," in *Dialectics and Humanism* (1987), no. 2.

6. For further discussion of some of the problems with Metz's theory, see my review of his *Film Language* in *Film Comment,* (Fall 1974).

7. Barthesian semiology, in such works as *Mythologies* and *Critical Essays,* appealed to the political ambitions of young film scholars; Barthes used semiology to demystify bourgeois ideology, and that appeared to establish a socially critical role for the theory.

1. PSYCHOANALYSIS: METZ AND BAUDRY

1. See Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 32–51.

2. Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus," in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, ed., *Apparatus*, (New York: Tanam Press, 1981), pp. 41–62; Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier" and "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study," in Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 1–87 and 99–147 respectively.

3. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Apparatus*, pp. 25–40.

4. Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator."

5. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Der Ersatz fuer Traeume," in *Neue Freie Presse*, March 27, 1921. This essay is analyzed in Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 167–168. Another early theoretical development of the film dream analogy can be found in Henri Diamant-Berger, *Le Cinema* (Paris: Le Renaissance du livre, 1919). This text is discussed in Stuart Liebman's doctoral dissertation: *Jean Epstein's Early Film Theory* (New York University, 1980). See especially the Chapter "Early French Film Theory." These texts are not cited in order to establish the first film/dream theory, but only to show the approach is quite old.

In *The Struggle for the Film: Towards a socially responsible cinema* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), Hans Richter analogizes film to dream in a way reminescent of Hofmannstal, while in *Running Away from Myself: A Dream Portrait of America Drawn from the Films of the Forties* (New York: Grossman, 1969), Barabara Deming employs a dream/escape model for film.

The film/daydream analogy also has precedent: see Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, *Movies: A Psychological Study* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 12–13.

6. Coincidentally, Stanley Cavell, who actually opposed the film/dream analogy, also cites the invisibility/absence of the film spectator in regard to the world of the film as a crucial element of the power of cinema. See Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, Enlarged Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), esp. ch. 19.

7. Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner's, 1953), pp. 411–415.

8. Baudry, "The Apparatus," p. 57.

9. Baudry, "The Apparatus," p. 53.

10. Baudry, "The Apparatus," p. 54.

11. Baudry, "The Apparatus," p. 58.

12. Plato, *The Republic*, vii, 514.

13. Baudry, "The Apparatus," p. 44.

14. Baudry, "The Apparatus," p. 50.

15. Baudry, "The Apparatus," p. 50.

16. "Ordinarily" here is meant to acknowledge that there are certain tricks which, as in Cinerama, can induce the impression of, say, plummeting. But these are extraordinary moments of cinema, and not the sort of evidence to be adduced in an account of the customary effects of film.

17. In Metz, "The Fiction Film and its Spectator."

18. *Ibid.*

19. A film/dream analogy of Baudry's that I have not touched upon is the assertion that, in film and dream, representation is taken as perception. I reject the notion that film spectators mistake cinematic representations as perceptions and, therefore, reject the basis of this analogy. However, since much of the following argumentation of this book is aimed at discrediting this account of the reception of cinematic representation, I have not found it convenient to replicate that debate at this point. Thus, I ask the patient reader to wait for the refutation of this particular analogy in what follows.

20. Moreover, if Baudry's analogies between film and dream are groundless, then it is hard to see how film could simulate dream, nor is it easy to see how film could trigger the same sort of regression that dreams do.

21. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," p. 36.

22. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," p. 44.

23. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," p. 50.

24. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," p. 46–47.

25. The discussion of voyeurism can be found on pp. 58–68 of Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier."

26. The discussion of disavowal can be found on pp. 69–74 of Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier."

27. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," p. 75.

28. One might also wish to challenge the viability of an essentialist approach in art theory in general. The tradition of essentialist art theory is rejected in both my "The Specificity of the Media in the Arts," in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* (1985), vol. 19, no. 4, and my "Medium-Specificity and the Self-Consciously Invented Arts," in *Millennium Film Journal* (1984–1985), no. 14/15.

29. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," pp. 64–65.

30. Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," p. 136.

31. Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator," pp. 106–107.

32. Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator," p. 107.

33. One might attempt to defer this objection by invoking Freud's "The Poet in Relation to Daydreaming," in Philip Rieff, ed., *Character and Culture* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). However, Freud's analogies there are more a matter of themes than of narrative structure.

34. This hypothesis obviously bears some relation to Freud's conclusion in "The Poet in Relation to Daydreaming," though Freud seems concerned primarily with the *content* of popular stories in relation to daydreams. Freud, it seems to me, is also susceptible to an observation that we will raise against Metz, viz., that the source of daydreams may be popular narratives rather than the other way around.

35. See Jerome L. Singer, *The Inner World of Daydreaming* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), especially ch. 6, "Childhood Origins of Daydreaming."

36. This is not meant to suggest that we understand only what we create, but only that we have a particular advantage in such circumstances. Obviously, the

natural sciences provide us with a great deal of knowledge about that which we have not created. However, even here, knowledge is often acquired by envisioning the way in which variables can be manipulated in order to produce the outcome in question. And we test our hypotheses by *constructing* experiments.

37. This concluding objection is primarily directed at "The Apparatus" and "The Imaginary Signifier" rather than "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator." For the former essays speak of the apparatus as such and of *cinematic* representation as such whereas "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator" restricts its compass to a *kind* of film, namely the fictional. However, a similar line of attack could be developed in relation to the latter essay by questioning whether fiction, irrespective of particular stories, is a practice that warrants psychoanalyzing.

38. One motive for employing psychoanalysis in an account of *movies*, which defenders of Metz and Baudry may feel I have overlooked, is that what are called *movies* obviously exert a great deal of power over large masses of people. That is, the intensity of the experience of vast numbers of people of movies is distinctive and calls for explanation. The psychoanalytic projects of Metz and Baudry are warranted, then, it might be argued, as a means of explaining the power of movies. This is not an altogether implausible maneuver. However, given the methodological constraints noted above, such a maneuver needs to show that there is no cognitivist account of the power of movies with the same explanatory persuasiveness as the psychoanalytic accounts. And I, at least, deny this. For an attempt at a cognitivist account see my "The Power of Movies," in *Daedalus* (Fall 1985), 114 (4):79–104. In later chapters in this book, I will further develop the view introduced in that article. In this way, I will attempt to discredit the pretensions of psychoanalytic theory by demonstrating the superiority of my own rival, cognitivist theory in accounting for the power of movies.

2. MARXISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS; THE ALTHUSSERIAN-LACANIAN PARADIGM

1. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 24.

2. T. W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 31.

3. See Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: McKay Books, 1957). Packard's influence on the post-World War II generation of Americans, who comprise the stateside ranks of contemporary film theory, may not only account for their predisposition to mind-manipulating hypotheses, but also for their frequent use of advertisements as examples of the ideological operation of representation in general. Contemporary theorists love to decode advertisements. Indeed, perhaps it was this obsession with advertisements that enabled Americans to appreciate Barthes as a kindred spirit. Of course, this is just armchair sociology. From the point of

view of theory, however, one thing needs to be said about the use of advertisements as privileged examples of how representation operates. Advertisements are representations that are expressly made to cultivate capitalist desires. That they succeed in doing so comes as no surprise. On the other hand, that such representations succeed in doing so implies nothing about representations not expressly designed to induce capitalist desires. That is, the fact that advertisements are ideologically inflected—given that they are made for just such purposes—indicates nothing about whether or not other sorts of representations, or whether representation as such, are ideological instruments.

4. The word "settled" in the above sentence is key. I do not wish to deny that at various times Marxists have attempted to embrace psychological frameworks other than the Lacanian one. Pavlovian classical conditioning was at one time thought of as an appropriately materialist psychology. Nor is Lacanian psychoanalysis the only sort that people have attempted to link with Marxism. Benjamin, Adorno, and Marcuse all, in different ways, attempted to adapt Freudian psychoanalysis for Marxism, while Reich tried to fuse socialism and his own brand of psychoanalysis. Recently, Bertell Ollman, in his book *Alienation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), criticized Marxism for a lack of psychology. However, in his *Social and Sexual Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), he does not call upon Lacan to fill this gap but rather Reich. The point here is that there is no settled Marxist psychology, that is, one that is endorsed in the classical sources of Marxism and that Marxists agree is correct.

Mention of alternative psychological frameworks to Lacanianism, of course, prompts the question of why film theorists chose it. Two considerations seem relevant here. First, as noted in the previous chapter, the notion of the mirror figures importantly in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Thus, the theoretical language of Lacanian psychoanalysis contained a potential pun which allowed film theorists to appropriate it by speaking of film as a "mirror." Second, from the earliest stages of the film renaissance of the sixties, English-speaking film devotees were dependent upon the French for their most ambitious theories—the auteur theory and the Bazinian theory of realism. Thus, when the English-speaking film intelligentsia turned to psychoanalysis, it is not surprising that the favored variety would be French, since it was from the French that the earlier stages of sixties' film culture had derived its inspiration. Moreover, many contemporary film theorists were trained in comparative literature departments and French departments, which made it natural for them to seek their psychoanalytic models in Paris. These observations, of course, are not made in an attempt to rationally justify contemporary film theory's preference for Lacanian psychoanalysis over rival psychoanalytic positions, but only to explain that choice.

5. Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," in his *For Marx* (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 219–247; "Freud and Lacan," in his *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 189–220; and "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" in *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 127–188.

6. Including Althusser's "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht," in *For Marx*, pp. 129–153; his "A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 221–229; and his "Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 229–242.

7. For a defense of Althusser's functionalism see G. McLennon et al., "Althusser's Theory of Ideology," in *On Ideology* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), pp. 77–106.

8. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," p. 143.

9. Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," p. 232.

10. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," p. 162.

11. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," p. 182.

12. It must be noted that some contemporary film theorists regard Althusser's account here in terms of interpellation as too simplistic. They do not believe that interpellation is the only element in subject construction. For, it is held, the subject is not simply positioned by the ideological address, but there is also interaction between the subject (subjectivity) and discourse. For example, it will be argued that the subject *sutures* or fills in the discourse. See, for example, Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), for example, p. 103. This complication will be taken up in later sections of this book.

13. This is not strictly accurate. For Althusser, ideology always addresses subjects who have already been affected by previous addresses.

14. The hedge, *virtually*, here is meant to acknowledge that some Althusserians might exempt scientific discourse from the realm of ideology. In this, such epigones would appear to be following the master.

15. See Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 50.

16. See, for example, Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 47.

17. Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," p. 219.

18. My colleague Christina Crosby has pointed out to me that the Lacanian view of humans as ever striving for a lost plenitude after having initially fallen from it sounds suspiciously theological; nor does the explanation of all human behavior in light of such a master myth seem particularly informative or rich.

19. See Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," in Lacan's *Ecrits* (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 1–8.

20. Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage," p. 2.

21. P. Q. Hirst has questioned the notion advanced by Althusser on the shoulders of Lacan that subjects are constituted in the mirror stage. Hirst's point is logical and unavoidable. For the infant to recognize itself as a subject in the mirror presupposes a subject already possessed of the capacities supposedly acquired at that stage. What does the recognizing, in other words, if not a subject? See P. Q. Hirst, "Althusser's Theory of Ideology," in *Economy and Society* (Nov. 1976), 5(4):404ff.

22. Similarly, what can count as a disunity in contemporary film theory is rather

expansive, for example: uncoordinated motor functions and contradictions, presumably of both an ideological and a logical nature. But surely these items are too disparate to be regarded as on a par with each other.

23. Some might argue that the difference cited above suggests that the title of this chapter is a misnomer—that it is wrong to call the ruling paradigm "Althusserian." I disagree since despite expansions made on Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," research in contemporary film theory still seems ultimately based on the Althusserian assertion that ideology is at root subject construction and that ideology under capitalism is a matter of producing unified, autonomous subject positions, often misleadingly called Cartesian. For different reasons, contemporary film theorist Colin MacCabe would agree with me about the sustaining influence of Althusser on recent research. He writes: "Throughout the seventies much work of cultural analysis on the left and particularly within *Screen* took place within a space articulated by the work of French Marxist, Louis Althusser." In MacCabe's "Class of '68," in his *Tracking the Signifier, Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 13.

24. It is no accident that my example here is of a male child. Freudian and Lacanian theories both have much neater accounts of the way in which male children are acculturated than they do of female children. This has long been recognized by feminists. Those feminists who accept the overall contours of the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm, or even merely just psychoanalysis, spend a great deal of theoretical energy attempting to adjust the approach to accommodate the female experience into the account. However, this may be tantamount to adding epicycles to the Ptolemaic theory of the heavens; that is, perhaps feminists would be better off dropping the paradigm altogether.

25. This belief may, however, be debated. For a brief introduction to some of the disputes see David Archard, *Consciousness and the Unconscious* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishers, 1986), especially pp. 73 and 83.

26. Jacques Lacan, "The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits*, p. 66. This is sometimes also referred to as "The Rome Discourse."

27. Jacques Lacan, "The function and field of speech," p. 67.

28. David Archard has shown to my satisfaction that Lacan's theory of language, as he develops it from Saussure, is completely ill-founded. See his *Consciousness and the Unconscious*, pp. 56–103. Also, for my own objections to what has come to be called post-Saussurean linguistics in contemporary critical theory, see my "Belsey, Language and Realism," in *Philosophy and Literature* (April 1987).

29. Lacanians would object here. They would argue that their theory of meaning shows there is no fixity of meaning. In this I think that their method of linguistic theorizing has got things backwards. Linguistic theorizing is supposed to explain how things like language learning can happen. If you come up with a theory, like theirs, that cannot account for this because of its denial of any fixity of meaning, then you should drop your theory. The problem with the use of Saussure in much

contemporary theory is that it proceeds in too metaphysical a manner, deducing how the world must be from basic premises, come what may. But linguistics is a science that starts of with some phenomena that wants explaining.

Many contemporary theorists think that fixity of meaning must be denied because of the supposed arbitrariness of the sign. If meanings exist diacritically, they will always be sliding, it is said. However, this is not a very compelling argument. Consider an analogy. The positions in a baseball game,—pitcher, catcher, short stop, *left* fielder, and so on—are relationally defined. But there the relations are fixed, fixed by the rules of baseball. You may say the rules of baseball are arbitrary. But once the rules are in place, there is nothing arbitrary about who is the third baseman. So also with language.

These comments are probably too brief to convince the proponent of contemporary theory. For more detailed and sustained objections to the use of Saussure in contemporary theory consult the items in the preceding footnote.

30. Jacques Lacan, "The function and field of language and speech . . . ," p. 68.

31. Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," p. 211.

32. Lacan seems to see the Imaginary as developmentally leading to the Symbolic on the basis of such data as the fort/da game Freud observed his grandson playing (which is noted in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Standard Edition,* p. 18). That game, played with a ball of string and with a *mirror,* involves themes both of difference and of presence and absence. See Lacan, The function and field of speech," pp. 103–107. One may of course wonder about the advisability of basing so much theory on this single report.

33. Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," in *Tracking the Signifier,* p. 65. We should also note that along with the realm of the Imaginary and the realm of the Symbolic, Lacan upholds another. This is the realm of the *Real.* Often it correlates with themes of death and sexuality and sometimes it sounds as though it might pertain to what lies outside symbolization. Since it is not as explicitly crucial to contemporary film theory as the Imaginary and the Symbolic, we shall, given our purposes, pass over it.

34. Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan," p. 216.

35. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics,* p. 50.

36. Above, I have defined what it is for a belief or an assertion to be ideological. Some might want to maintain that entire symbol systems—like cinema or language—can also be ideological. But such systems would not be susceptible to the preceding definition for they are neither true nor false. So what would be the criteria that identify ideological symbol systems? From my perspective, I would claim that *if* an entire symbol system could be characterized as ideological, it would be because it (1) excludes or represses the representation of certain social facts or relations, by virtue of its structure, and (2) is used to uphold some system of social domination by means of the exclusions it enjoins. I should add that I am not convinced that either cinema as such or a natural language like English is inherently ideological.

37. In "On the Theory of Ideology: The Politics of Althusser," *New German Critique* (Spring 1976), no. 8, pp. 54–79, J. Rancière charges that Althusser's view

of ideology ignores class struggle. The objections in this paragraph follow in that line of criticism.

38. Louis Althusser, "The 'Piccolo Teatro,'" p. 149.

39. Louis Althusser, "A Letter on Art."

40. Louis Althusser, "Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract," pp. 238–239.

41. It may be argued that I have scored some cheap shots in the last two paragraphs by relying upon a distinction Althusser makes between ideology and science that few contemporary film theorists accept. However, the way in which this distinction is usually negotiated by contemporary theorists is to say that there is no such distinction. And that will only make my objections, except for the last one, stronger, not weaker.

42. The arguments in the preceding paragraphs correspond to certain points made by Martin Hollis and Charles Taylor. See Hollis' "Of Masks and Men" and Taylor's "The Person," both in Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of the Person* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 217–233, and 257–281 respectively.

43. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* book 1, part 4, sections 1, 5, and especially 6; and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* especially chap. 1, sections 12 and 16–23.

44. Frederick Engels, *Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science* (London), p. 128.

45. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* especially "Criticism of the Third Paralogism of Transcendental Psychology." There Kant points out that the unity of the self as the transcendental unity of apperception neither entails nor is equivalent to the identity of a person. Psychoanalysis does not confront the issue of the transcendental self at the proper level of generality. For an example, though probably an unsuccessful one, of a direct confrontation with the Kantian variety of self-identity see Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957).

46. It should be clear that what capitalism needs are subjects, who, for whatever reason, carry out certain kinds of behaviors. And this type of subject, call it an economic subject if you want, is compatible with a wide variety of metaphysical characterizations. Another way to put the point is to say that the abstract subject of Althusser's apparatuses is not determinate enough to serve as what we just, somewhat loosely, called a capitalist subject.

47. For example, a follower of late Wittgenstein is likely to endorse these as fundamentals for social science.

48. Karl Marx, *Capital,* Frederick Engels, ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 1:737 (emphasis added).

49. A great deal of empirical data concerning working-class beliefs is usefully summarized in *The Dominant Ideology Thesis,* by Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), pp. 140–155. This book defends the notion that what I have called the Economic Force Hypothesis is superior to the Ideology Hypothesis.

50. Ted Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), p. 44.

51. Another major problem with the Ideology Hypothesis is that its proponents constantly speak as though there is *a capitalist ideology*. But the vexing problem here is that no one seems to be able to characterize it or its ingredients. This particular problem is examined at length in the *Dominant Ideology Thesis*.

52. Perry Anderson has argued that Western Marxists have become embroiled in questions of method and aesthetics as a result of their impotence in the face of a stagnant working class; in *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976). Perhaps the elevation of ideology—a form of cultural work—is a further symptom of that impotence, an attempt to make intellectual work a central force of capitalism. And if the ideologues are the greatest threat to the revolution, doesn't that make the antidote—cultural analysis—our greatest hope? One cannot help feeling that intellectual delusions of grandeur provide emotional support to the Ideology Hypothesis.

53. A similar point has been noted by contemporary film theorist Philip Rosen in his "'Screen' and the Marxist Project in Film Criticism," in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (August 1977), p. 280.

54. See Thomas L. Friedman, "J.R.'s Message? As Varied as Kibbutz and Bazaar," *The New York Times,* April 1, 1986.

3. THE CINEMATIC IMAGE

1. Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1981), p. 12.

2. Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theater," from John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theater* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), section 72, p. 203 (emphasis added).

3. Brecht, "From the Mother Courage Model," *Brecht on Theater*, p. 219 (emphasis added). One, of course, wonders if Brecht can consistently reject naturalism *tout court* given the pragmatic instrumentalism he adopts toward symbol systems in "Against Georg Lukàcs," *New Left Review* (March-April 1974), no. 84. I think that one way to assuage this tension might be for exegetes of Brecht to say the "illusionism" quotations I stress in this section are off-hand or careless remarks of Brecht that do not really reflect his considered judgment on these matters. This may be true. Nevertheless, I still feel it is important to examine the claims of the interpretation of Brecht that I characterize above because something like that interpretation has been shared by numerous ciné-Brechtians as well as by certain proponents of avant-garde theater. That is, I am concerned with the way in which Brecht has been used rather than in a possible, rational reconstruction of his system. On the other hand, for those who want to claim that I have radically misinterpreted Brecht, it is important to recall that he really did write what I have quoted.

One argument in favor of the illusion theory of spectator response—i.e., the theory that says spectators believe they are somehow witnessing "the real thing" is to ask a psychological question: "Why would audiences cry and scream unless they believed the events before them were actually occurring?" I do not examine this type of argument at length above because it is not one that ciné-Brechtians rely on. However, for the record, let me say that I would begin to answer it by denying the psychological assumption that we are moved only by events that we believe actual. We can be moved by the prospect of an event, that is, by thinking that an event might be possible. For elaboration, see my "The Nature of Horror," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Fall 1987).

4. Plato attacks mimesis on epistemic grounds in *Republic,* book 10. It is this attack that Hegel questions in the opening of his "Introduction" to the *Philosophy of Fine Art.* It is also interesting to note, from the perspective of contemporary film criticism, that Plato not only condemned mimesis on epistemic grounds but also condemned mimetic drama for inclining spectators toward incorrect behavior (cf. *Republic,* book 10, 606d). See also books 2 and 3 of Plato's *Republic.* And see Immanuel Kant, "Analytic of the Sublime," in *Critique of Judgment,* section 42.

5. *Brecht on Theater,* p. 215.

6. *Ibid.*

7. For an account of illusionism, as that is conceived from a Brechtian viewpoint, by a contemporary film theorist, see the late Martin Walsh's *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema,* pp. 11–14. This interpretation is especially significant in that it explicitly applies the Brechtian notion of illusionism to cinema. Walsh's account also corresponds, I believe, to my own.

8. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 46–47.

9. See Walsh, p. 12, and Stephen Heath, "Le Père Noël," *October* (Fall 1983), no. 26.

10. In his *Meditations,* Descartes claims that we will our beliefs, a view roundly challenged by Spinoza in his *Ethics.*

11. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 29.

12. Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 42.

13. There is a remaining Brechtian illusion which has not yet been discussed, namely the audience's purported identification with characters. Since this illusion has not be developed at length by contemporary film theorists, it seems appropriate to treat it in a footnote.

Illusionism, according to Martin Walsh, involves "a desire to (psychologically) penetrate individual experience; its primary appeal is to the emotions rather than the intellect, desiring the audience's empathetic involvement with the events presented before them" (Walsh, p. 11). And, as we saw in a previous quotation from Brecht, this empathetic union with fictional characters distracts us from noting the ideological contradictions in the representations. Furthermore, this sort of illusion,

which we can call character identification, can occur with any sort of mimetic representation that employs characters, including novels, lyric poems, historical paintings, theater, and obviously film.

Now there is no question that mimetic representations can arouse the emotions of spectators, and manipulate those emotions in ideologically significant ways. But the theoretically relevant question is whether identification is the mechanism through which our emotions are aroused and directed. Undoubtedly, people—including film theorists, critics, and nonspecialist viewers—are always talking about identifying with characters. But is this way of speaking either accurate or useful?

One problem with evaluating the notion of character identification is that it is not clear what it is meant to refer to. When a spectator identifies with a character does she somehow come to believe that she is the character? Do I think that I am James Bond when I watch *From Russia With Love* or that I am Rosenthal during *Grand Illusion?* If normal viewers identified literally with the characters onscreen, they would soon become unhinged. They would run from the theater screaming as they and their fused screen-selves were about to be crushed by a train, pushed off a building, knifed, or shot at by a German border patrol.

Also, the concept of identification does not appear to have the right logical structure for analyzing most of our emotional responses to characters. That is, "identification" suggests that when we bond with characters we somehow become them, which would entail that we have the same emotions that they do. But this is very often not the case. Whatever parting emotion King Kong feels for Anne Darrow, it is not ours; rather, we feel pity for this great beast brought low. We do not fear for our life during the kangaroo court scene in *M*, rather we feel the injustice of the trial. When lovers are united at the end of melodramas, we do not fall in love; rather, we are glad that people so suited have found each other.

Our emotional responses are certainly related to the emotions of characters. But they need not and quite often are not identical to the emotions of characters. That is, a strong sense of identification would suggest that the emotions the characters evince are the same as those the spectators possess. But this most often is not the case. Rather, the action, emotions, and plights of the characters generally bring about qualitatively different emotions in spectators, ones appropriate to spectatorship, e.g.: we don't feel humiliated when Harold gives his speech in *The Freshman*, we feel amused; when the Tramp wins Georgia, we are gladdened for him, not smitten with her; and when Mad Max battles Blaster in the Thunderdrome, we feel suspense, an emotion Max can't afford to indulge if he intends to stay alive.

Stated formally, a strong sense of character identification would imply a symmetrical relation of identity between the emotions of spectators and characters. But generally, the relation is asymmetrical; the characters, in part through their emotions, *cause different* emotions in spectators. This logical asymmetry indicates that identification, a symmetrical relation, is not *the* correct model for describing the emotional responses of spectators. (This line of objection would also carry against a weaker sense of identification, one, for example, where identification is defined as an emotional tie that causes a spectator, consciously or unconsciously, to think, or feel

or act as she imagines the character with whom she has the tie does. For, as we have seen, the spectator in a large number of cases does not feel as one imagines the character does.)

I would not wish to deny that there are cases where the audience and a character may share *parallel* feelings. In horror films, for example, we tend to be reviled by the monster in the same way that the character is. However, cases of matching emotion like these are only one of the ways in which a spectator can relate to characters. So, even if there is some place for some as yet to be described empathetic relation between audience and character, identification cannot be the whole story of the audience/spectator connection, nor is it clear that it is even most of the story.

Often in American films, audience concern for certain characters, like cowboy heroes and misunderstood gangsters, is encouraged by emphasizing that character's courteous, caring, respectful, or thoughtful treatment of supporting characters, especially ones who are poor, old, weak, lame, oppressed, children, etc.—that is, characters who are the protagonists' inferiors in some sense, but whom the protagonist treats with consideration (conversely, villains are often marked by their mistreatment of such characters). Thus, by presenting characters who display values or interpersonal ideals that the audience acknowledges, shares, or feels allegiance toward, films nurture a pro-attitude in the audience on behalf of the spectator.

But feeling allegiance or having a pro-attitude is not the same as identification. I can feel allegiance to South African blacks and Irish Catholics in Belfast without imagining myself to be one of them. Nor, by the way, returning to the issue of illusion, does a response to shared values seem to me to be the sort of thing that is usefully described as a matter of deception. In sum, though I do not deny that, broadly speaking, something like empathy may be relevant to some of our emotional responses to characters, I suspect that allegiance to shared values may be a more critical lever for shaping our emotional responses in film. For some further elaboration see my "Toward a Theory of Film Suspense," in *Persistence of Vision* (1984), no. 1.

14. Quoted in Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 149.

15. Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic* (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1978).

16. Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), p. 23.

17. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), and John Ellis *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

18. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 41–42.

19. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 217–222.

20. Also, the historic mode of representation omits use of the second person pronoun as well as use of the first person. This is taken to imply that the realist representation does not acknowledge the presence and the productive activity (e.g., interpretive activity) of the reader. This purportedly reinforces the impression of "self-containedness" of the representation which reinforces the impression that it "comes from nowhere."

21. Metz, "Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism)," in *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 91–98.

22. For further criticisms of the notions of illusion, naturalness, and transparency as discussed in the preceding two sections of this chapter see my "Conspiracy Theories of Representation," in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1987), vol. 17.

23. Jean-Louis Comolli, "Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field," in *Film Reader* (Northwestern University) (January 1977), no. 2, pp. 131–132.

24. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 28.

25. Heath *Questions of Cinema,* p. 53.

26. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image,* p. 159.

27. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 106. Bordwell's discussion of perspective is very clear-headed, perhaps the most useful summary of the perspective issue in recent writing on film theory.

28. Jan B. Deregowski, "Illusion and Culture," in R. L. Gregory and E. H. Gombrich, eds., *Illusion, Nature and Art* (New York: Scribner's, 1973), p. 183.

29. Ichitaro Hondo, "History of Japanese Painting," in *Painting, 14–19 Centuries: Pageant of Japanese Art* (Tokyo: Tokyo National Museum, 1957), 2:54–55.

30. Bordwell, p. 107.

31. Stephen Heath, "Le Père Noël," *October* (Fall 1983), p. 88.

32. Stephen Heath, "Le Père Noël," pp. 85–87. For a sustained rebuttal of the charges Heath lays at my door step, see Noel Carroll, "A Reply to Heath," *October* (Winter 1983), pp. 81–102.

33. In denying that perspective is appropriately described as a convention, I am not saying that perspective pictures lack conventions altogether. I am only holding that conveying a sense of spatial depth by means of perspective is not an arbitrary convention. For a convention is something adopted in the context where there are alternative ways of achieving the same effect and it is a matter of indifference as to which of these alternatives is adopted, such as driving on the left or right hand side of the road. But if perspective is more accurate spatially, then it is not the case that it is one among numerous, indifferent alternatives for depicting the appearance of spatial layouts.

34. Bordwell, p. 107.

35. Similar objections to Heath can be found in Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film,* p. 25.

36. J. E. Hochberg and V. Brooks, "Pictorial Recognition as an Unlearned Ability," *American Journal of Psychology,* (1962), no. 75, pp. 624–628.

37. J. B. Deregowski, E. S. Muldrow, and W. F. Muldrow, "Pictorial Recognition in a Remote Ethopian Population, *Perception* (1972), no. 1, pp. 417–425.

38. John M. Kennedy, *A Psychology of Picture Perception* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974), p. 79.

39. Margaret A. Hagen, *Varieties of Realism: Geometries of Representational Art*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 86–87. I quote Hagen not to subscribe to her overall position but for her evaluation of the literature of cross-cultural perception.

40. K. J. Hayes and C. Hayes, "Picture Perception in a Home-Raised Chimpanzee," *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology* (1953), no. 46, pp. 470–474.

41. John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 51–52.

42. I don't think that the preceding paragraph demonstrates its case conclusively, but only that it renders its hypothesis plausible, something that I take many contemporary film theorists would deny.

43. Where a cinematic image conveys a message statable in propositional form, it will be ideological roughly in accordance with the definition given of ideological beliefs in the previous chapter. However, it is also the case that many would be loathe to apply the predicate "false" to an image. Where an image does not have a propositionally formulatable message, nevertheless, some might still wish to designate it to be ideological. Perhaps, in such cases, we shall want to say that a cinematic image is ideological just in case the image and/or its contextualization in a concatenation of images obscures or otherwise fails to represent certain social relations or facts accurately, and that inaccuracy plays a role in some system of social domination.

4. NARRATION

1. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 8.
2. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions,* p. 7 (parenthesis added).
3. Ellis, p. 9.
4. For an account of the coherence of Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome,* see Noël Carroll, "Identity and Difference: From Ritual Symbolism to Condensation in Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome," in *Millennium Film Journal* (Spring 1980), no. 6, pp. 31–42.
5. I am following Kaja Silverman's translation of Benveniste's terms here. See her *Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 196.
6. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 218.
7. Quoted by David Bordwell, in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 341.
8. Coward and Ellis write "The narration does not appear to be the voice of an author; its source appears to be a true reality which speaks." In Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 49.
9. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 72, and

Jenny Simonin-Grumbach, "Pour une typologie des discours," in Julia Kristeva, Jean-Claude Milner, and Nicolas Ruwet, eds., *Langue, discours, société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 103.

10. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 21. In the section of this book entitled "Film Narration as Enunciation," pp. 21–26, Bordwell is particularly good at showing the confusion, often unnoticed, of contemporary theorists in their attempts to loosely extrapolate Benveniste's linguistic categories to texts and to films. Bordwell shows that what has transpired is pretty much a fanciful free-for-all with different theorists making of the original categories whatever they will.

11. See Raymond Bellour, "Hitchcock the Enunciator," in *Camera Obscura* (Fall 1977), no. 2.

12. Metz, "Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism," in *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 91–97.

13. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 21–26.

14. There is a particularly byzantine and probably incoherent formulation of the significance of enunciation in Stephen Heath's *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). Since I have dealt with this specific variant at some length in my "Address to the Heathen," *October*, (Winter 1982) no. 23, and my "A Reply to Heath," *October* (Winter 1983), no. 27, I shall not dwell here on the precise details of Heath's characterization of enunciation. Interested readers should refer to Heath's book and our ensuing debate in *October* for more intricate dialectics in the matter of enunciation.

15. Metz, "Story/Discourse," p. 96.

16. One reason to drop the personification of the film is the sheer silliness that the metaphor induces. Metz writes: "The film is not an exhibitionist. I watch it, but it doesn't watch me watching it. Nevertheless, it knows that I am watching it. But it doesn't want to know" (*Imaginary Signifier*, p. 96). He then goes on to attribute to the film a psychic act of disavowal. But this is word play, not theory. *Films* don't disavow anything in the psychic sense Metz implies, and I don't think we learn anything through the elaboration of this utterly fanciful conceit.

17. Mark Nash attempts to argue the case for the second person in cinema in his "*Vampyr* and the Fantastic," *Screen* (Autumn 1976), 17(3):29–67. Bordwell shows the error of his ways in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 23–24.

18. Also the notion that viewers do not regard films as constructions seems to be inconsistent with Metz's account of film fetishism. Purportedly, we are fetishists when we think that a film is well *made;* but doesn't this mean that when we are behaving as film fetishists, we believe that the film is constructed; indeed, we believe that it is well constructed. This observation is not offered in order to accept Metz's view of film fetishism, but only to indicate that it sits oddly with the theory discussed above.

19. Interestingly, the relativistic claims concerning interpretation that are widely popular throughout American culture converge on the type of interpretive freedom espoused by many literary critics and their followers in film. Perhaps those critics,

rather than fomenting a revolution, are reflecting the tendency of the culture at large to transform endemic principles of tolerance and pluralism into an epistemological creed.

20. See my "Address to the Heathen" and "A Reply to Heath" for further discussion of this variant of the enunciation effect.

21. It is ironic that while contemporary film theorists often derive their impetus from anti-formalism, they, nevertheless, appear to offer very generic accounts of representation which are not very specific historically and which seem to speak of invariant structures of realist representation, such as the effacement of enunciation. Such analyses could be called a species of formalist functionalism.

22. See my "Toward a Theory of Film Suspense" *Persistence of Vision* (1984), no. 1, for an amplification of the role of virtues in popular entertainment.

23. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, p. 54.

24. Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, p. 136. Heath calls this a simple definition. He seems to think that it is not complex because it does not address the purported fact that the narrative cannot suture every element in the film. None of the ensuing arguments against Heath's theory of movie narrative, however, is based on exploiting the lack of this complication in the equilibrium definition of film (movie) narrative.

25. Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, p. 133.

26. Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, p. 157.

27. Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, p. 36.

28. For example, Stephen Neale in his book *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), tries to apply systematically Heath's idea that genres are "instances of equilibrium." In the attempt to identify equilibriums and disequilibriums for every film genre, these concepts are bent completely out of shape. Equilibrium can mean order, law, harmony, and so on, while disequilibrium takes into account dramatic conflict, criminality, and discord. Neale does not confront the issue of genre films like *The Red Shoes* and *Von Ryan's Express* which do not end in equilibriums as he has characterized them. Are unhappy or tragic endings equilibriums even though they would seem to be discordances in the system of homologies Neale outlines? Neale might say that these endings *are* equilibriums because they reinforce some ideological tenet. But if we begin talking about disequilibrium-equilibriums, the system seems very ad hoc and *equilibrium* is emptied of explanatory power.

Another quite different problem with Neale's book is that he proceeds under the presumption that every film genre must correlate to some sort of psychic phenomenon or syndrome. He spends his procrustean energies matching each genre with exhibitionism, paranoia, and so on. But all his word play is to little avail since he has never provided any reason for us to believe that every genre has a psychoanalytic correlate; nor does such a presupposition appear probable.

29. Once the film scholar takes possession of a theoretical term like *violence*, she can begin reading the theory into the story of the film—finding it remarkable, for example, that the initiating change in such and such a movie literally is a violent act.

Thus, a description becomes parlayed into something that sounds like an analysis. But in fact such exercises are merely specious specimens of allegorizing—i.e., laying the scenario of the theory on the narrative by means of a pun.

30. Heath himself tends to identify the balanced repetition of a narrative with narrative coherence as such; see *Questions of Cinema*, p. 157.

31. For example, see my "The Moral Ecology of Melodrama: The Family Plot in *Magnificent Obsession*," *New York Literary Forum* (a CUNY publication), the *Melodrama Issue*, 1980.

32. The contemporary film theorist is prone to describe everything—film devices, whole films, and spectator-subjects—with the same words (*position, center,* and so on). This enables the theorist to slide rhetorically from the description of a device to an effect on a subject; a centered narrative centers a subject. One can only guess at the internal structure of these cause and effect relations. Is it contagion? Or is the appearance of a causal explanation advanced merely by means of equivocation?

33. David Bordwell comes to roughly the same conclusion in his *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 25.

34. V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Techniques and Film Acting* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

35. Lev Kuleshov, *Kuleshov on Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

36. It should be noted that it was not Pudovkin's purpose to proffer a picture of only one basic plot structure. Rather he intended to enumerate an exhaustive account of the principles that justify the insertion of a scene in a narrative film. He believes a scene can be added to a film if it is (1) an answer to a previous question; (2) a parallelism; (3) symbolism; (4) an instance of simultaneity; (5) a leitmotif. Only 1 and 4, I presume, are relevant to the discussion of the basic linear narrative that I take up in the current chapter. On the other hand, 2, 3, and 5 would be features of something more elaborate than a basic linear narrative. Tangentially, it is interesting to speculate that perhaps Pudovkin (mistakenly) believed that film is a language because his formulation of these principles for legitimately adding scenes to a film bear a passing resemblance to (recursively stated) grammatical rules. This is not to say that Pudovkin discovered a grammar of narrative or of film, but that he stated his recommendations in a way that suggests something like a recursive definition for well-formed sequences—rules for licitly adding scenes to scenes.

37. John Holloway calls this "proponing" in his *Narrative and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

38. In some cases, the questions that are answered by a scene or an event may not feel very acute. For example, the causal circumstances in an earlier scene may appear so implacably set out (a typhoon is heading toward an island, for instance), that we don't have much of a question to ask. Or a character may state emphatically what he intends to do in the next scene: "I'm going to the saloon to shoot Billy Ringo." The eventuations of such causes and intentions in later scenes seem better described not merely as answering scenes but as fulfilling scenes—i.e., scenes that fulfill what is

predicted, not simply asked, by earlier scenes. Consequently, one should perhaps enter a special sub-category—that of the fulfilling scene—to the above list. Yet one should recognize that it is a sub-category of the answering scene since in film fiction it is always possible for causal and intentional trajectories to make unexpected, hairpin turns. There is always a question—will the typhoon hit?—(though sometimes a slightly felt one) that underwrites a fulfilling scene. Evidence for this might be that if we have to leave the movie before we see the typhoon hit the island we are likely to ask an informed viewer something like "I didn't see it but the typhoon hit the island, didn't it?"

39. In many cases, an incomplete answering scene may not be recognized as such at first glance. We may only retrospectively realize that such a scene gave us a partial answer to a preceding question. Many of the "clues" in classical detective movies function this way. We might want to call such scenes ambiguous, incomplete answering scenes; they are ambiguous because their initial significance is different from their retrospective significance.

40. Pudovkin's parallelisms, leitmotifs, and symbols are digressions from this point of view. Also, a saloon chanteuse singing a barroom ballad in a western of a certain period would count as a digression. It would be interesting to investigate the types of digressions that appear mandatory in given genres in stipulated historical periods. One might be able to develop a list of recurring types of digressions in popular film. Needless to say, digressions in a linear narrative should not be mechanistically treated as automatic deconstructions of classical cinema; they are very often part and parcel of the form a filmmaker is working in.

Because of digressions, because of the various types of questioning scenes, because of the insertion of establishing scenes after the film is on its way, and because of the possibility of complex temporal relations between scenes (e.g., parallel narration), we should not anticipate that answering scenes will always follow scenes that initiate a question. Were we to diagram many movies in order to outline their question/answer plan, we would often discover that we would have to leapfrog, so to speak, several scenes in order to connect question scenes with their answers. The question scene still cognitively generates the need for an answering scene, but the answer may not appear immediately after the question. A question scene may be followed by a digression, followed by an establishing scene, followed by another questioning scene before we get an answering scene that correlates with our first question, for example. The more leapfrogging the film involves, the more complex (and less basic) we tend to think the narrative structure is. By the same token, if a question is raised that is presented as important—what will happen to character x?—and it is not answered, even via a complex process of leapfrogging, then we tend to find the movie incomplete. And if we cannot justify that incompleteness in terms of some meaningful point or quality that the film is projecting, then we tend to see such incompleteness in a negative light. A case in point is the failure in *The Hills Have Eyes, Part II*, to tell the audience what finally becomes of Jupiter's daughter.

41. For example, in *Theory of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960),

Kracauer often attempts to illustrate the nature of the episodic form by contrast to what he calls "the intrigue" and to studio-fabricated plots. I am less concerned with whether Kracauer's argument is sound than with the fact that he represents the tendency not only to associate the episodic narrative structure with realism and but to attempt to get a handle on that structure by contrasting it with mass movie plotting which is fundamentally erotetic.

One might argue that the episodic form has the credentials for being considered the basic film plot because of its close resemblance to the chronicle. And undoubtedly the episodic form is supposed to appear to be a chronicle. But it is in fact a highly mediated imitation of a chronicle rather than a chronicle pure and simple, since the events it strings together are selected not because they happened one after the other but in order to make a point—e.g., "love is fleeting" in *La Ronde*—or to evoke a quality—e.g., a sense of a social totality in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*. The kinds of spectator responses required to properly engage such episodic structures and to divine their purpose is far more demanding and complex than that required by an erotetic linear narrative.

42. After the last macro-question is answered and Johnny becomes a Confederate lieutenant, there is one more scene in the film, the saluting gag. From the viewpoint of the core structure of the linear erotetic film plot, such scenes are optional, though, of course, they may greatly enrich the film as a whole. For an analysis of the thematic significance of the saluting scene and its relationship to the rest of the film see my doctoral dissertation, "An In-Depth Analysis of Buster Keaton's *The General* (New York University, 1976).

Also, it should be mentioned that there is a standard deviation from the account of closure in movies just offered. Sometimes, especially in horror films, a movie may end by introducing one last unanswered macro-question e.g., is Freddy back at the conclusions of the first two installments of the series *Nightmare on Elm Street*. This secures the feeling of uneasiness and uncertainty to which such films are dedicated.

43. In *The General*, the battle sequences toward the end—through which Johnny wins his uniform—may appear tacked on. One reason for this is that the macro-question of whether Johnny will be allowed to enlist has not been as sustained as it might have been throughout the film. The battle seems extraneous to the most animated questions the film has raised and the film might have successfully terminated when Johnny makes its safely to town. In retrospect we recall that his girlfriend has made enlistment a condition for their relationship, but as the film unravels the issue gets lost and thus gives the battle scenes, wherein the uniform is won, an aura of superfluousness.

Isolating the macro-questions in a film—something most easily achieved after one has knowledge of the complete film—provides a powerful perspective from which to analyze the entire narrative structure of a film. We observe what questions are answered last in a film and then back up and enumerate all the scenes that set forth and sustain the question that elicits the final answer. For example, looking at the last scenes of *Bride of Frankenstein*, we see that they answer three narrative questions: will Baron Frankenstein be persuaded to perform the experiment? (he

will); will the monster finally have a friend? (he won't); will the Baron and his wife escape? (they do). Of these questions the last one is a micro-question generated by the circumstances of the experiment scene. The other two questions, however, are alternatively the basic issues of the majority of scenes in the film. The monster keeps searching for a friend in scene after abortive scene—thereby reasserting the question—while Dr. Pretorius tempts Frankenstein in alternating scenes. Finally, the questions converge when the object of the experiment becomes the creation of a female, potential friend for the monster.

What I am calling macro-questions might be referred to by many film theorists as "enigmas." This terminology derives from Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974). At best, this characterization is misleading. Most narrative questions are not obscure or unfathomable mysteries. Identifying them as such seems a rhetorical gambit that enables the psychoanalytically inclined theorist to conflate narrative questions with things that one might more appropriately think of as enigmas, e.g., the nature of the human subject. Perhaps by calling such narrative elements macro-questions, we can make a contribution to short-circuiting some of the most egregious arguments by equivocation that are rampant in film scholarship today.

44. The historical point made above requires some clarification. Feature filmmaking, strictly speaking, did not supplant serial filmmaking; both arose roughly contemporaneously, and both continued to be made throughout the twenties and thirties, though feature filmmaking clearly became the ascendent form. However, it also seems evident that when the feature form was evolving, with such examples as Lang's *Spiders,* one notion of the way in which to organize feature-length films was to string serial scenes together back to back, resulting in a great deal of aimless peripeteia; in this light, the introduction of the framing story in Lang's *Destiny* might be seen as a means of bringing order between the disparate action scenes by way of a presiding macro-question.

Of course, the serial mode of narration continues today in such genres as the soap opera; for an analysis, see my "As the Dial Turns: Thoughts on Soap," *The Boston Review* (February 1988).

5. CINEMATIC NARRATION

1. Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," *Screen* (Winter 1977–78), vol. 18, no. 4.

2. These characterizations of the shot/reverse shot figure derive from David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 110.

3. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 203.

4. Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," p. 43.

5. Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 448. This article has been criticized by William Rothman in "Against the System of Suture," which is also anthologized in the Nichols' volume.

6. Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," p. 37.

7. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 111

8. Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 56–57.

9. Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," p. 449.

10. Barry Salt, "Film Style and Technology in the Forties," in *Film Quarterly* (Fall 1977).

11. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 97. For examples of followers of Heath's expanded view of suture, see Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, pp. 213–214, and Philip Rosen, "The Politics of the Sign and Film Theory," *October* (Summer 1981), no. 17, p. 19.

12. Jacques-Alain Miller, "Suture," *Screen* (Winter 1977–78), vol. 18. no. 4.

13. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, pp. 52–53.

14. Colin MacCabe, *Tracking the Signifier; Theoretical Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 87–88.

15. Note that the problem I point to here does not rely on a view on my part that evidence can be divorced from theory. I admit that theory may shape observation. However, the objection above is that we are confronted only with theory sans evidence of any sort.

16. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 111.

17. This is a point that Richard Wollheim makes against all Lacanian theory in his "The Cabinet of Dr. Lacan," *New York Review of Books* (1979), vol. 25, nos. 20 and 22.

18. Philip Rosen, "Adorno and Film Music: Theoretical Notes on *Composing for the Films*," in *Yale French Studies* (1980), no. 60, pp. 157–183.

19. Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). Though Adorno and Eisler co-operated on the theories in the book only Eisler signed it.

20. Rosen, p. 174.

21. Rosen, p. 175.

22. Adorno and Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, pp. 75–76.

23. Adorno and Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, p. 78.

24. Perhaps the use of ghosts in this account reminds contemporary film theorists of Dayan's talk of ghosts in relation to suture. See the first section of this chapter.

25. Aaron Copland, "Tip to Moviegoers: Take off Those Ear-Muffs," in the *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1949, section 6, p. 28. This article is discussed at length in Roy M. Prendergast's *Film Music: A Neglected Art* (New York: Norton, 1977), ch. 6.

26. Perhaps the use of the horns here is also suggestive of the hunt, another form of violent activity associated with high-spiritedness.

27. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 103.

28. The discussion here is limited to nonvocal music because songs with words generally provide the referential material needed to secure some measure of emotive explicitness.

29. Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 98.

30. Johann Adam Hiller, "Abhandlung von der Nachahmung der Natur der Musik," in Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, ed., *Historisch-Kritische Beytrage,* (Berlin, 1754), 1:524.

31. James Beattie, *The Philosophical and Critical Works* (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1975), p. 463.

32. Kivy, *The Corded Shell.*

33. Eduard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957); Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* p. 102.

34. For one source of this view of the emotions see Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

35. For a thorough account of musical representation see Peter Kivy, *Sound and Semblance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

36. Some (Goodmanians) might prefer to say here that the music labels the scene with a feeling, or that it attaches a feeling label to the scene.

37. In previous discussions of the factors that give rise to the power of movies—especially the discussion of pictorial representation—I have argued that little or no training is required on the part of the audience in order for it to comprehend the symbol in question. It *may* be the case with movie music that some familiarity with the musical idiom being employed is requisite. This probably does not require formal training, and, given the kinds of music movies employ, it is likely that it is picked up rather rapidly, almost by osmosis. However, even if movie music is more a matter of cultural conditioning than pictorial recognition, it is still appropriate to refer to its reception as direct and immediate in the sense that once one is familiar with the musical idiom one recognizes the qualities in the music without performing operations of inference, decoding, or reading.

CONCLUSION: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY FILM THEORY

1. The modern locus classicus of the position against metaphor as an essential part of science is Pierre Duhem, *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), especially part 1, ch. 4.

2. The locus classicus for the defense of analogy in science is Norman Campbell, *What Is Science?* (New York: Dover, 1953), ch. 5. See also Rom Harré, *The Principles of Scientific Thinking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

3. See Mary B. Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), for a thorough discussion of the logic of scientific metaphor.

4. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 13.

5. Some readers may be curious about the relation of piecemeal theorizing to an earlier essay of mine entitled "Film History and Film Theory," which appeared in *The Film Reader* (1979), no. 4. At this time, I regard that essay as really addressing the small-scale question of the way in which to identify a film as art in terms of the evolution of style. For further philosophical developments along this line of thought see my "Art, Practice and Narrative," in *The Monist* (April 1988).

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